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A SPIRIT OF MIRTH



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A SPIRIT OF MIRTH

BY
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“fair and free,
In Heav’n yclep’d Euphrosyne,
And by men, heart-easing Mirth.”

MILTON

A SPIRIT OF MIRTH

CHAPTER I

NEW YEAR'S EVE

WITHOUT, a cold, biting, wintry wind, which seemed to hurry up and down the narrow street as if it were imprisoned between the houses.

Within, the warm, close atmosphere of a house in which several fires were burning and no windows open.

Without, the fitful gleam of a hazy moon, drifting through grey clouds, and the glimmer of the street lamps, like smaller moons dropped on earth.

Within, a steady glow from the hearth on the ground floor, a twinkle of a smaller fire in the room above, and the tiny winking light of a lowered gas-jet at the top.

Without, the sound of the sighing wind and the flick of rain against the windows.

Within, an occasional burst of talk from the kitchen in the basement, when the door was opened on the dark staircase, and the unending jingle-jangle-thump-thump-thump of somebody playing on an old piano.

It was an ordinary, dull, shabby house in Airy Street, turning off Edgware Road. Rarely was a street so mis-named. All the cold winds, fogs and smells of the neighbourhood seemed to drift into Airy Street, but fresh air itself was strangely absent.

Mrs Simmons said that the street was "an extree-ordinary place for smuts," and it gave that impression to strangers. The houses looked smutty; smuts gathered, like moths, round the gas-lamps, and even when the

pillar-post was repainted every year its vivid scarlet was spoilt in a day with big, clinging smuts.

It was a street of lodgings; every house had its little card of Furnished Apartments displayed in the ground-floor window or in the dingy half circle of glass over the front door. There were trades and professions of all descriptions represented, from the round red lamp of a doctor's surgery at one end of the street to the rickety square one, painted with the two words, "Chimney Sweep," at the other.

There were several dressmakers, two piano-tuners, a professor of the violin and banjo, a photographer, who was never known to have any sitters; a metal-worker, who had enraged the postman by substituting for the number of his house the words "Ye Denne" on a small copper plate; an outfitter, a watchmaker, an insurance agent, and any number of music teachers.

Many of the houses were simply adorned with the name of the owner on a brass plate, his lodgers having to content themselves with much smaller plates fixed over their respective bells.

This was the case at No. 77, where the single word "Simmons," nearly worn away, was to be seen on an old plate over the knob in the centre of the door. A caller, unknown to Simmons, rightly came to the conclusion that the knocker above was reserved for the master of the house, as the three small bells were each appropriated by other people. On the bottom one was a well-polished little plate showing the name "Miss Sapio"; over the next the two words "Dovey, Cornet"; and over the third the somewhat puzzling inscription, "Eddy Moore, the Human Eel."

Mr and Mrs Simmons occupied the basement and ground floor. Miss Sapio, who was a professional lady earning a fair salary, was an ideal lodger for the drawing-room suite. Mr and Mrs Dovey could just manage to hang on, as it were, by the skin of their teeth, to the two

rooms above. Mr Eddy Moore, or the Human Eel, was in sole possession of the top set, consisting of a small sitting-room, a bedroom behind it, and an attic, or box-room, with one tiny pane of glass looking out upon the upper windows and crowded chimneys of the neighbouring houses.

On this particular night, when the wind rushed backwards and forwards in Airy Street whining to escape, and the jingle-jangle-thump-thump-thump of Mr Simmons's piano had been going from nine o'clock till nearly midnight, Mr Eddy Moore's apartments were absolutely silent and nearly dark.

The fire in his sitting-room had died away, but his supper was neatly arranged on the one small table; bread and cheese, an old decanter holding a small quantity of brandy, a bottle of soda-water, a mince-pie, and two slices of cold plum pudding.

There was a bunch of holly in a small vase placed in the centre of the table. His tobacco jar, with a canary on top of the lid, its yellow china plumage dulled by age, was ready to his hand on the mantelpiece, with his pipe and a box of matches. His old brown slippers had been placed to warm inside the fender before the fire went out.

The gas was turned as low as possible. The second room—his bedroom—was in darkness. A thin shaft of light crept under the partially closed door of the attic.

Such a tiny shaft of light! It was almost too feeble to be seen at first, failing to throw any brightness on the gloomy walls; but weary feet, climbing the stairs, would instantly have trodden into the faint path it made across the floor. Tired eyes, thus attracted, would have instinctively turned towards the nearly closed door. Any human being, if only for an idle minute, would have wondered what was to be seen within the room—a student, bending over his books and working late into the last hours of the dying year; or a woman, watching at the bedside of one who suffered; or a beggarly miser, counting his silver and pence with untiring greed?

None of these things were to be seen within the room. It was bare and curtainless; the old green blind, being a little small even for the tiny pane, was framed in a narrow strip of grey light from without; the gas jet was turned almost as low as in the sitting-room; there were the shadowy outlines of several pieces of furniture—a chair, a little chest of drawers with a fixed looking-glass on top, a jug and basin on an equally diminutive washing-stand—and, facing the window, under the slope of the roof, a bedstead with knobs at each corner. The knobs looked big and black and seemed to sway about in the darkness, for they happened to stand out against the frame of the window.

On the bed was a big coverlet of black-and-white check, well tucked in, and over the tidy line of white sheet at the top was the dark shape of a head, indefinite and misty in its tangled hair.

This was Euphrosyne, wide awake.

She was lying on her back, but her knees were drawn up so that she could grasp her small feet in her hands, or vigorously rub them. A man's coat, thrown over the bed, added weight, without warmth, to the blankets and coverlet. Had she stretched to her full length there would still have been a great expanse of cold sheet beyond. She often crept into the bottom of the bed and lay there, curled up like a kitten—it was a favourite trick of hers—but on this particular night she decided, after thinking it over, that the task was too chilly to be accomplished.

Her chin pressed the bedclothes snugly against her neck, and her eyes roved slowly from object to object in the dim light. She was not in the least afraid of being alone, for her fancy filled the room with quaint companions. She saw "Florence" sitting on the one chair, dressed in white, while "Count-Countess" knelt at her feet in shining armour.

"Florence" and "Count-Countess" were the hero and heroine of an endless, romantic story which little

Euphrosyne told to herself, "Florence" being her favourite name, and "Count-Countess" an invention of her own as none of the men's names she knew sounded grand enough for a knight. The conversation between this imaginary couple, with which Euphrosyne was amusing herself at this minute, was always of a meandering, vague description, with many repetitions of "No, fair lady," and "Yes, brave knight."

From the chair she looked at the wash-stand, and recognised another favourite of fancy perched on the edge of the ewer, no other than "Winkey," a pet oyster, whom she saw in the shape of a big shell supported on tiny legs. "Winkey" began to talk, in the voice of the little girl, with "Biddy," an imaginary chicken. They resembled "Florence" and "Count-Countess" in the habit of unending, desultory conversation. "Winkey," her favourite, frequently indulged in a chuckle, while "Biddy" occasionally gave vent to a soft, but cheery, clucking.

Then she looked at the green blind and pictured a hundred faces in its creases and lines. She could see dogs and cats and people, even little groups of houses and bunches of flowers. The softest curtains of silk or lawn would have failed to interest Euphrosyne as much as the old, green linen blind.

She listened indifferently to the distant jingling of the piano till it ceased. Then she heard Miss Sapio's voice, shrill and hilarious, bidding good-night to somebody whom she called "Duckie," followed by the banging of doors.

Silence.

Euphrosyne had rubbed her toes into a delicious tingle of warmth. Her eyelids drooped. "Florence" and "Count-Countess" grew indistinct. "Biddy" and "Winkey," obedient darlings of a daydream, left off chattering. She was slipping, slipping into sleep.

Suddenly the door was pushed open, and she watched

it with half-unconscious interest. A long, straight shadow fell on the opposite wall, and a figure, so tall that it had to stoop in entering, stepped to her side. It bent over her, stealthily, eagerly, holding its breath.

Euphrosyne leapt up in her bed.

"My daddy!" she cried, "my daddy!"

The tall figure, stooping to enable her little arms to clasp his neck, looked almost as if he had snapped in half, bending from the waist at such a sharp angle.

"I've been awake all the night," said the child, with pardonable exaggeration. "I've been waiting to have my supper with you. Take me up, daddy."

"Well—as it's New Year's Eve," answered the tall man.

He got her little winter jacket from the cupboard, while she pulled on her stockings and shoes, and, wrapping her also in the coat thrown across the bed, carried her into the sitting-room. She clutched him round the neck, and laughed, and bobbed up and down in his arms.

He put her down in the one easy chair—an old, comfortable, battered easy chair—turned up the gas, and, fetching some sticks and waste paper from a closet at the top of the stairs, quickly kindled a fire.

The embers were still hot. Then he wiped his hands on the lining of his long overcoat, unwound the muffler about his neck and sat down, opposite to the child, to change his boots.

Eddy Moore, the Human Eel, was a most peculiar-looking man; over six feet in height, well knit, but appallingly thin; colourless, with close-cropped, light brown hair; big, blue eyes, and small, delicate features. His face was cadaverous, and his bones—the sharp knees, the pointed elbows, the lean shoulders—looked as if they would cut through the cloth of his clothes, but there was at the same time a certain curving, indescribable grace in all his movements.

His expression was intensely melancholy, except when

he looked for any length of time at the child, then his whole face changed and softened and he became young—in an ordinary way he might have been taken for any age from twenty-five to fifty—while his blue eyes, usually vacant and sad, filled with the pleasure and pride of deep, unselfish tenderness.

Eddy Moore earned his living as a contortionist. He was engaged for the pantomime season at Drury Lane Theatre, but worked during the remainder of the year with a party of acrobatic comedians in the smaller music halls in London and the provinces. An exception from the general rule, he looked on his profession as a Human Eel with mingled satisfaction and distaste; he was proud of his actual work, but the ordinary interests of the music-hall man did not appeal to him. Temperate, intelligent, dedicated from childhood to exacting, daily physical labour, there were many undeveloped qualities and possibilities in this grotesque, silent, unlettered man.

His life had been opened and wonderfully illuminated, for three short years, by marriage with a woman who was his superior in every way, but who loved him with all the loyalty and strength of her nature. A stage-struck girl when first they met—well born, well educated, wilful, independent—Euphrosyne's mother had cut herself adrift from all her friends, shipwrecked, drowned, in the opinion of her own social world, by marrying a man who was simply an acrobat, a buffoon, the chance acquaintance of a miserable engagement in a provincial pantomime.

Had she repented of her hasty step, and the poor Human Eel proved himself the dark scoundrel her people foretold, there would probably have ensued a reconciliation with outraged uncles and aunts, but as it was, she lived and died without regret, and her people never forgave her husband for making her happy in his own way. He added to his iniquities, quite unconsciously, by ignoring his wife's family and showing no desire or intention of deserting his little daughter, whose uncommon name,

Euphrosyne, had been her mother's before her. The spelling of the word, although mastered by Eddy when he was married, had caused him trouble in the brief days of his courtship. He confused its pronunciation with Auld Lang Syne—Eu-phro-syne—and spelt it with an amazing superfluity of letters.

Sitting opposite to him now, the child's small face sparkled and gleamed with pleasure. She watched his every movement, now and again bumping up and down in her seat with her hands on the arms of the chair, unable to keep still. He asked her questions as he pulled the table closer to the fire, and got another plate, spoon and fork from the cupboard.

"Did Mrs Simmons put you to bed, Phose?"

"No, daddy!" with a vigorous shaking of her head.

"Why not?" asked her father, with a look of mild surprise and disapproval.

"Didn't come upstairs at all, daddy."

"Then who set the table for my supper?"

"I did."

"Did you turn down the gas yourself, dearie?"

"Yes, standing on a chair."

"Well, I hope you were very careful, Phose, not to get yourself on fire," said Eddy Moore.

"I didn't never get myself on fire, daddy."

The Human Eel shook his head gravely. All Mrs Simmons's stories of little girls being burnt to cinders if they went near the gas had failed to frighten Phosie. Had her father ordered her not to climb on chairs to lower the lights he knew she would have obeyed him, but he never definitely told her to do, or not to do, anything. He warned her of possible dangers and trusted to her commonsense. This was not weakness on his part, but an innate reliance on her character.

Eddy emptied the pockets of his overcoat—sweets, oranges, nuts, a tin of sardines, and a box of glistening crystallized cherries.

"Come along, Phosie, we'll eat our last supper in the Old Year," said the man, pushing her chair to the table. "I shall never have you sitting up so late as this again, you understand, never!"

Having asserted his parental authority—said the proper thing—Eddy Moore gave himself up to enjoyment. He devoured bread and cheese and sardines with the hunger of a man who has fasted long, but the child ate daintily, picking each cherry out of the box with delicate, deliberate fingers, and refusing both the pale plum pudding and the heavy mince pie, gifts from their landlady, Mrs Simmons.

"You must come to see the Panto later on, Phose," said her father, as he sipped his brandy-and-soda.

"I only want to see you, daddy," she answered. "But I wish you were a skeleton this year. I like skeletons better than eels. Skeletons' ribs are so funny. I used to count 'em. Eels haven't got any ribs."

"Of course skeletons are more natural and nicer for children to see," agreed Eddy. "But it gives you fine opportunities when you're an eel. It's pretty work, mine is, but it's hard, Phosie. It wears a man out. He can never do anything else."

He pushed away his unemptied glass and turned towards the fire, locking his bony hands between his knees and staring into it. He often forgot the shortness and inexperience of the eight years of life which Euphrosyne had left behind, and talked to her as if she were a woman.

"When a boy is apprenticed, like I was, when he's only nine years old, and then goes all through the hoop—learns everything you can learn in the business—sometimes he gets to wondering whether it was worth while. He can never take a holiday, it would stiffen him up, for he's got to keep himself loose whatever happens. He never does anything fresh, he can't make much money, and what do people think of him? Nothing! Just nothing!"

The little girl, slipping out of her chair, went on to his knee and nestled in his arms. She did not understand why he should suddenly look so sad, but she pressed her round cheek against his cadaverous face in silent sympathy.

"It's for your sake, Phosie, that I wish I belonged to some other business. I wish I was a parson, or a chemist, or a judge, or something respectable of that sort!" continued poor Eddy. "I feel I can't do the best for you. Now, if your mother had been spared—!"

He gathered the child up in his arms and carried her across the room to where a portrait hung of his dead wife. It was an old-fashioned photograph, taken on the beach at a seaside place where they had spent their honeymoon. It showed a slight, girlish figure in a frock with tight sleeves and little flounces round the skirt. She held her hat in her hand, and her thick, wavy hair was blown back from her face; it was a frank, laughing face, with straight features, a big mouth, and a very decided, square chin.

As Eddy Moore looked at it a misty light stole into his mild blue eyes. He held the child a little closer, her face still pressed against his.

"She was very pretty and cheerful," he said softly, half to himself. "She was very fond of me."

He pondered a while in his slow way, then he looked at the child.

"We wanted to have you, Phosie, but now—as it's turned out—what are you smiling about, my darling? What have I said?"

"I was smiling before," said Phosie, apologetically.

"What about?" asked her father, smiling too.

"I don't know. I just felt happy, daddy."

She held up her finger and turned her head towards the window, her soft tangle of pale brown hair sweeping across his face.

"Listen!" she said. "I can hear the bells! Listen! Do you hear them?"

He shook his head.

"Not yet, Phosie."

They did not move or speak for several seconds.

"I can hear them now!" exclaimed Eddy.

"It's the New Year!" cried Phosie. "It's the New Year, and it's my birthday! It's my birthday, daddy!"

She was born on New Year's Day. Her father, for the moment, had forgotten it. He carried her to the window, raised the blind, and they looked out.

The rain had ceased and the sky was flooded with the light of the moon, breaking through hills of cloud, while the strong wind murmured in the distance, farther and farther away. The street was empty. The sound of bells clashed and pealed and echoed in the stillness of night.

Eddy and the child listened in silence. He pressed the small fingers that twined round his hand against his lips.

His thoughts were in the past. He stood alone looking out into such another night, listening—listening—to the strange sounds in his wife's room near by, torn with fear and helplessness, unmanned, at his worst and his best in the agony of love and dread. He seemed to hear once more the weak, aimless, probing cry of the new-born child, and to feel the painful, struggling sob in his own throat.

Euphrosyne looked at him wonderingly. His strange expression, as these vital minutes lived again in his memory, puzzled her. She recalled him to the present by slipping out of his arms and beginning to dance about the room, holding out the skirt of her coat to show the gay, striped pink nightdress underneath.

"Dance! Dance, daddy!" she cried.

Eddy Moore hummed a tune and emphasized the time by snapping his bony fingers as smartly as castanets. Phosie capered and kicked, dipped and whirled. They often danced together, not waltzes or polkas or other foolish checks to the inspiration of mirth, but wild, individual, original movements.

Her father, whose long legs looked like a pair of mad, animated compasses, danced with the peculiar boneless agility of the trained contortionist. Sometimes he stooped forward to the ground and ran for a dozen steps, his feet apparently chasing his hands; then he would bend backwards till his head rested in the small of his back; once or twice, by way of a change, he would "hop the frog"—as acrobats call it—which means that he would suddenly lie down on his chest and curve his body upward and forward until his toes were locked round his own neck, when he would proceed to jump about on his hands; now and again, at Phosie's order, he would "shoulder his leg," in other words, lift his foot slowly in a straight line over his head. His face, the whole time, never lost its solemn expression.

At the end of the dance, suddenly stooping over the little girl, he swung her from side to side of the room in leaps of frenzied delight.

Her little feet hardly touched the ground; her hair flew out in a tangled mist; her lips were open with panting joy; her arms were outspread like the wings of a bird.

She seemed to fly.

Then, sinking down in the old chair by the fire, he soothed her to sleep with untiring patience. Slowly the quivering little form grew still, the bright eyes became dreamy, the hand loosened its clutch at his coat sleeve, and the laughing mouth curved into repose.

He carried her into the attic, drew off the coat and the shoes and stockings, and tucked her into her bed. Then he stooped, kissed her hair, turned out the light, and softly crept out of the room.

Thus, with laugh and dance and quiet sleep, the lonely man and his happy child opened a New Year.

CHAPTER II

A FLOWER IN A DITCH

PHOSIE found life decidedly interesting in Airy Street.

Mr Simmons, the landlord, was a composer—by courtesy—who earned his living in a peculiar way by scoring music, and occasionally providing original melodies, for the poorer class of music-hall performers. He was very well known to the musical conductors of London and suburban halls, who frequently had it in their power to put a little money in his pocket. Having played in theatre orchestras all his youth and composed a great number of waltzes, marches and comic songs, Mr Simmons was quite equal, as he said himself, “to turning his hand to any branch of the business.”

He was a big, silent man, with a round face, on which the features seemed to have been thrown by a careless hand. One of his eyes was immovable in his head, and his hair, shaved away from a thick neck and from behind his ears, was a dirty, sandy grey, his head being quite bald in patches. He was always in his shirt sleeves, without a collar, and he smoked incessantly.

The keys of Mr Simmons’s piano were yellow with age and worn down with use. He played, as he smoked and breathed, without thought or effort, rattle, rattle, rattle all day long. His little front room was strewn with sheets of music, printed songs, old newspapers; the chairs had the appearance of having seen better days, being large and upholstered in plush, but shabby, discoloured, and weak on their legs. The mantelpiece was crowded with china ornaments, dusty bunches of lavender and

grass in blue vases, and faded photographs of music-hall artistes in startling costumes.

On the walls hung framed copies of Mr Simmons's own compositions, a few old play-bills, and a big portrait of a particularly repulsive boxer, inscribed "To John Simmons, Esq., from his old pal Yours truly 'Baby' Bull"; a second picture of the "Baby" hung over the piano—"Baby Bull and Family," the family consisting of a very stout lady, five children, and two bull dogs. On the floor was a threadbare carpet, with a grey sheepskin mat before the fireplace, and a strip of oil-cloth laid down, like a red carpet on state occasions, from the door to the piano. The windows were never opened and rarely cleaned. At night the gas flared without shades from a chandelier in the middle of the blackened ceiling.

At Mr Simmons's left hand stood a little table, bearing his desk and inkstand, where he jotted down his inspirations and did his orchestration, rarely moving, except for meals, away from the jingle of the keys.

Mrs Simmons was an untidy, shiftless, good-tempered lady, with a great quantity of black hair and a passion for entertainments. She spent three or four nights every week at one music-hall or another, the frequent change of programme preventing her from being bored. She always went to the cheapest seats, unless Mr Simmons could be induced to get her a free ticket, and returned home at half-past eleven, hot, tired, smoked dry with bad tobacco, but with her hunger for amusement still unsatisfied. Mrs Simmons would have got up in the middle of the night to go to a music-hall.

Eddy Moore, when he first lodged in the house, paid her a small weekly sum to look after his little girl, but Mrs Simmons, whose own children had been shamefully neglected, though never ill-used, soon discovered that he was too particular. An easy way out of the hair-brushing problem, she argued, would be to crop off Phosie's curls altogether, but Eddy Moore objected. He said he would

brush it himself, and did so. Then Mrs Simmons considered the child's daily bath a wicked waste of warm water, not to mention the unhealthiness of the habit. Again Eddy Moore settled the matter by impressing on the child herself, young as she was, the strong necessity for soap and water.

The first-floor lodger, Miss Sapio, was a tall, handsome young woman with tawny yellow hair, wonderful eyes of the same colour, and fine, straight features. She frankly called herself "a show woman," but she was more than that, being quite a clever actress, with a sense of humour and smouldering fire of dramatic passion hidden in the depths of an unawakened, self-indulgent nature.

No one knew Miss Sapio's real history, for she had a vivid imagination and a bad memory, so that the stories she told of her life were apt to become confused. She had been married, but sometimes her husband was represented as having died fighting for his country, at others he was casually mentioned as a successful tea-planter in Ceylon—expected home next summer—and all her other connections were equally vague.

A certain brother Jack, who figured in her conversation at this period, appeared to belong to the Naval and Military services indiscriminately, except when he was farming in Manitoba, or attached to the British Embassy in Russia.

Her sister Marguerite was sometimes the wife of a professor at Cambridge, sometimes of a country vicar, and sometimes the chatelaine of a grand old manor house in the north of England.

Even the story of her pet dog, a tiny liver-and-white spaniel, was wrapped in mystery, for at first his mistress had bought him for a song in Drury Lane, then she had rescued him at great personal danger from the brutality of a gang of roughs in Hoxton, and then he was the gift of a broken-down man of genius whom Miss Sapio had befriended in his darkest hour.

She was an educated woman and could be charming, but long association with people who were mentally and socially her inferiors had coarsened her tastes and warped her finer instincts. Conscious of her beauty, conscious of her deterioration, there was nevertheless something magnificent—something that not only quickened the senses but moved the heart—in the vitality and wasted possibilities of this still young, still attractive woman. At times she could be terrible, when her tongue was unbridled and her temper uncontrolled, but as a rule she was lazily good-humoured and always generous.

Eddy Moore, when first Miss Sapio took possession of the first floor, had told his child not to speak to her or go into her rooms. Having worked in the same pantomime as Miss Sapio in the provinces, he had heard her talk, and knew she could be violent and evil-tongued.

One day Miss Sapio met Phosie on the stairs, Phosie being accompanied by her invisible pets, the chicken and the oyster, for whose benefit she was squeezing against the wall to give them room to walk beside her on the narrow staircase.

“Hullo! Who are you?” exclaimed Miss Sapio, kindly.

Phosie told her name.

“Oh, the kiddy on the top floor,” said Miss Sapio; ‘I thought you didn’t belong to old Simmons. Let’s have a look at you.’”

She put a big, shapely hand under the little chin and turned her face up. Phosie looked into the bold, tawny eyes with a child’s open curiosity. Her own face, strained upward, was serious for a second in its interest of expression, then the sweet mouth broke into the ready smile of good fellowship. Miss Sapio stooped down and kissed her.

“There, run along!” she said, and watched her out of sight.

Miss Sapio made an opportunity to speak to Eddy Moore.

"What a jolly youngster you've got," she said. "She reminds me of my little sister Marguerite. I don't mind her coming into my room to see the dog, you know. I'm fond of kiddies, when they're clean."

Eddy thanked her a little nervously. He was rather afraid of Miss Sapio. She guessed it and laughed.

"It's all right, old man," she said, suddenly. "I know what you're thinking about, but you needn't be frightened. I'll be careful what I say before the child."

He stammered a few words in answer to her frankness.

"You can't be too careful when they're young," he said, feebly.

Miss Sapio agreed in strong language. Eddy looked at her a little reproachfully.

"Oh, come, you're no kid!" she exclaimed. "I shouldn't have said it if she'd been here."

Eddy, in spite of his repugnance, told Phosie she might go into Miss Sapio's room, for the simple reason that he had not the courage to forbid it.

Mr and Mrs Dovey, whose whole existence was passed in straining and pulling to make both ends meet, were a most depressing couple. Mrs Dovey worked as a jacket hand at a big dress and mantle maker's in Holborn. Mr Dovey—fifteen years of whose life had been spent in earning the small capital which he lost in a musical instrument shop in fifteen months—played the cornet in a music-hall orchestra at night, and gave lessons, at one shilling per hour, in the daytime.

It was among these people, in the shadow of these narrow and mean walls, that Phosie spent the years of her childhood.

Her father could well have afforded a brighter and fairer home, but he was haunted by the dread of leaving his child penniless if he died; the poor Human Eel had a bad habit of always expecting to die, and that was the reason that he hoarded his small salary.

Her happiest hours were spent in his company. They

went out together, and she told him stories of "Florence" and "Count-Countess." She spent a great deal of time reading to him a curious selection of borrowed books. Mr Simmons lent them *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, the *Pickwick Papers*, and several old-fashioned very lengthy novels. When the pages were torn, or missing, Eddy would fill in the blank spaces with recollections from old melodramas seen in his boyhood.

Mrs Simmons passed them on the *Family Herald Supplements* every week, which little Phosie tried to enjoy because the stories evidently impressed her father. Mrs Dovey's contributions to the child's literary education consisted of tracts, and bad tales of the kind known as "goody-goody."

It was Miss Sapio, choosing her gifts in the light of the memory of nobler days, who gave Phosie a few of the many cherishable, imperishable books of fairy lore.

Gentle Hans Andersen found his way to the little top rooms in Airy Street, with his tin soldiers and his talking flowers; the Brothers Grimm brought their witches and hobgoblins; Shahrazad filled the air with undying perfumes of the East; the Mad Hatter, the Cheshire Cat and Alice were frequent visitors; even the immortal heroes—Perseus, Jason, Heracles—were known to little Phosie in the simple words of an English story-teller, and she read of a certain gentle knight who was pricking o'er the plain long before she knew that his adventures were really written in verse.

Her father could have told her no such tales. Indeed, he listened to them himself with all the simplicity of a child, taking legend and symbol in a literal sense.

Phosie had the gift of gaiety; she devised games for herself, invented stories, cut out rag dolls, which she stuffed and painted in gaudy tints, and covered quires of cheap writing-paper with badly-drawn, but comic, pictures.

She early assumed the household duties, supplementing

Mrs Simmons's haphazard cooking with daring experiments in cakes and puddings; she kept the top floor as tidy and smutless as she possibly could, and it all afforded her intense amusement.

Phosie was never the girl to shed tears over trifling troubles. As a mere child she instinctively differentiated between the things which matter, or do not matter, in daily life. If her household attempts were successful she was absurdly elated; while a slight mishap only spurred her to greater efforts, an utter failure brought out all her reserve force, but never prevented her from laughing at herself.

She was a great favourite with Mr Simmons, who looked upon his own children, three loutish boys, as his wife's exclusive property for whom she was solely responsible.

Phosie usually visited Mr Simmons in the late afternoon, sitting down beside the piano to talk if he happened to be alone, or placing herself in one of the plush arm-chairs, on the opposite side of the room, if he happened to be interviewing a patron.

The gentlemen who sought his services were usually blue-chinned, very smartly or very shabbily dressed, talked slang, and smoked incessantly. If they were musical they whistled their ideas to Mr Simmons, who jotted down the notes on a small sheet of music paper.

The lady visitors were generally very friendly, even affectionate in manner, with a fondness for fancy handbags, high heels and flowery hats. There was a great similarity in their complexions and the colour of their hair. Phosie often wondered why such pretty golden hair turned brown at the roots.

Mr Simmons was alike indifferent to the gentlemen's chaff or the ladies' fascinations. He composed or scored their music with an air of complete detachment. Relying on his undoubted cheapness he demanded payment in advance, with the understanding that his work should be altered a reasonable number of times to suit the purchaser.

"Why do you make all your tunes so much alike, Mr Simmons?" asked Phosie, innocently, after listening to a sentimental ballad, a comic song, and a composition to be played during the performance of trained dogs.

Mr Simmons turned his squint in her direction and smiled, for the first time that day.

"Because I only charge 'em half-a-crown each, my dear," he answered.

"Then you could make them different if you chose?" she said.

"Of course I could!" said Mr Simmons. "I could write an opera if they was to pay me enough, or an oratorio. Why not?"

If he meant to be sarcastic—his horrible eyes and heavy features never changed their expression, so that it was impossible to judge—it was lost upon Phosie.

"How clever you are, Mr Simmons!" she exclaimed, with a genuine belief in any man's possibilities which made some people call her, in after years, a born flatterer.

Miss Sapiro became another of her warm friends. At the light tap of her foot on the stairs Miss Sapiro's door would open, and the tall, handsome woman, dishevelled about the head, and dressed in strange garments, would spring out and seize upon the child.

Sometimes Phosie struggled away, laughing, and then Miss Sapiro would call her a little wretch—a monkey—a puss—an imp—anything which came into her head, but never a coarse or cruel word. When she showed an inclination to accept hospitality, Miss Sapiro bribed her to stop with chocolates, small toys, or penny bunches of flowers. She told her long stories of Jack and Marguerite, the never-seen brother and sister, and allowed her to play with a store of old finery.

None of these things really influenced Phosie's affection. She liked Miss Sapiro for herself, not for her gifts, but there was something about her which repelled the child. Of course she was unable, as children are, to give

any reason for this feeling. It was subtle, unexplainable, but at times Miss Sapio offended her inner consciousness, as the smell of the stalks of dead flowers, or the sound of a vile word, offended her peculiarly keen senses.

Mr and Mrs Dovey frequently invited Phosie to tea on Sundays. They were rather afraid of the mild Human Eel, and secretly disapproved of his profession. With them she was seen at her best. Her chatter amused them, and her laughter drove the demon of depression out of their room. She made them think of the children of their dreams—the dreams of half-forgotten youth when they had loved each other.

She listened to Mr Dovey's gloomy views on the decadence of the cornet, and to Mrs Dovey's recollections of brighter days, with as much interest as to Miss Sapio's most thrilling story of her brother Jack's adventures; entertaining them in her turn with snatches from the books she was reading and descriptions of her father's achievements. She danced, and even acted little plays of her own invention. Sometimes Mr Dovey played the cornet, if he felt in sufficiently good spirits, and then Phosie sang "Believe me if all those endearing young charms," and "The Minstrel Boy" to his accompaniment, firmly convinced that Moore's Melodies were specially composed for that instrument, while Mrs Dovey forgot her never-finished labours of finishing jackets and listened to the incongruous music with placid pleasure.

Mrs Simmons was the one person in the house who was indifferent to the child. Phosie's youth and ignorance of music-hall matters probably accounted for this. At first she had been struck with her bright face and quantity of curly hair, but as time went on she was less and less inclined to share in the household's affection for the little girl. Phosie, feeling antipathy in the air, tried to avoid her, became silent and watchful in her presence, and almost afraid of her loud laugh, and full, red face.

So the days slipped past, and the long, long years of childhood were left behind.

The self-told story of "Florence" and "Count-Countess" lost its interest. "Biddy" and "Winkey" ceased to be realities. She discovered that her father, once thought to be so old, like all the other grown-up people in the world, was almost young. She began to pay attention to her frocks, and to secretly exult in the shortness of her upper lip and the length of her eyelashes.

Without any loss of high spirits, she was stirred with new emotions none the less beautiful because they are known to nearly every sensitive girl for a very brief, easily-forgotten period of her life. She feels as if she were awakening to the consciousness of separate existence; doubly bound to those she loves, for all her natural affections are strengthened at this time, she suddenly discovers the joy of solitude. Her thoughts are too evanescent, too delicate, to be shared with the most intimate companion. For a little while there is no sentimentality, or even religious fervour, in her dream of awakening.

She is simply content To Be, and her most serious thoughts flash with minutes of wild, unexplainable joy, when the heart seems to leap into the throat and the limbs are as light as air.

Thus, like a flower at the edge of a ditch, Euphrosyne raised her little head—pure, delicate, stretching towards the sun—from out the dreariness and dirt of Airy Street, brightening all her poor surroundings with something of her own gaiety and innocence.

CHAPTER III

LITTLE GUS

“ ‘CHER!” cried Little Gus, giving a loud, single knock at Mrs Simmons’s area door.

It was a warm night at the end of May. He pushed back his cap and leaned against the wall, panting.

Little Gus was a butcher boy, but not the typical butcher boy of song and story, who is invariably bull-necked, muscular, a terror to smaller boys—a butcher in the bud.

Gus was small, pale, and the hand which steadied the oblong wooden tray on his shoulder was like a claw. He did not whistle, after the manner of his kind, or exchange defiances with passing youths to beguile the tedium of waiting. He was too tired for that, even if he had had the courage.

It was ten o’clock, Saturday night. Little Gus’s master, two streets away, had been shouting “Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy! Buy!” since five in the afternoon, but he was a strong man with the prospect of a good supper before him, while Little Gus, tea being a thing of the past, had nothing to look forward to but bed.

“ ‘Cher!” he yelled again, listlessly repeating the single knock.

The door was opened by a girl. He knew her well, and his face brightened. He discreetly dropped his business voice in addressing her.

“ ‘Ullo! Ol’ woman out?” he asked, with a jerk of the head towards the passage.

"Mrs Simmons? Yes. I'll get a dish. Can't you come in and rest for a few minutes, Gus?"

"Can't—'urry!" answered the boy, who always omitted the small words that connect a sentence.

The girl disappeared into the darkness of the passage and reappeared with a dish. She stooped forward to look at him, as he dabbed a small piece of meat on to it, with interest and curiosity.

The light from the lamp in the street fell on her face. It was Phosie Moore, but not the Phosie of the old days.

She was dressed in black, a worn-out dress of mourning; her hair was twisted into a tight plait; she wore a pair of old, rusty, beaded slippers, found among discarded rubbish after Miss Sapio left Airy Street; her hands were roughened with hard work, and her face had lost its rounded curves.

She looked what she was—a little drudge, underfed and growing too fast, like a fair weed in poor soil. But as she looked at the boy her eyes grew bright and impish. He read her thoughts.

"Can't—afraid," he said. "They'd catch us—sure—you go—by yerself."

"No! You're worse off than I am," she replied. "Why haven't you more pluck?"

"Dunno!" said Gus, sadly.

Phosie did not look contemptuous. She was too sorry for the boy. Her feeling was one of impatient helplessness.

It was two years since her father died. Never-to-be forgotten night! It still haunted her mind—the sudden awakening from sleep; the strangers in the room; the dragging on of clothes; the drive through the flaring streets; the great building to which they took her; kind, curious faces turning to look as she was hurried along white-washed passages; a long, quiet room, with rows of beds; and then—her father's face, with closed eyes, as white as the pillow, and her father's hand stretched out, palm upwards, as white as the sheet.

He had met with an accident on the stage—she remembered grasping that fact in the midst of her dazed horror—and his right side was paralysed. The nurse bent over him and spoke. Phosie could only stare at the strange white face, like the mask of the face she knew. She thought he was asleep.

The nurse spoke again. Phosie, glancing up, with sudden intuition understood the expression of the doctor, who stood immovable on the opposite side of the bed. She realised that her father was drifting into eternal sleep.

“My daddy! My daddy!” she cried in a shrill voice.

At the sound of her cry his eyelids quivered, lay still, quivered again, and lifted on her face. He looked at her—one long, quiet, conscious glance—and died.

Phosie had returned to Airy Street, to be consoled with passionate tenderness by Miss Sapio, and with more considerate kindness by Mr and Mrs Dovey.

Poor Eddy Moore, in his dread of leaving his child penniless, had been tempted, only a few months before his death, to invest the greater part of his savings in an apparently safe theatrical speculation, dazzled by the prospect of big returns. Unfortunately the speculation, like so many of its kind, ended in disappointment and disaster.

Mr Simmons, self-appointed guardian, found that Phosie's inheritance amounted to an elaborate contract with Eddy's ruined partners, and a hundred pounds in the Post Office Savings Bank. He decided, quite sensibly, that she must be taught to earn her own living, paying a small weekly sum for her board and lodging in Airy Street until she was old enough to take care of herself.

For several months she continued to occupy her little room at the top of the house and life was very much the same as it had been in Eddy Moore's time, except for the loneliness in her heart. Outwardly she soon recovered from her loss, laughed and chattered as much as ever, and never spoke of her father.

Then Miss Sapio obtained an engagement to go to America, and went away from Airy Street, leaving Phosie with tears and embraces, and clasping her great treasure, an old paste necklace, round her neck as a parting gift.

This was the first of a rapid succession of changes. Mr and Mrs Dovey were obliged to move into cheaper lodgings, and they too passed out of Phosie's life.

Mr Simmons, after twenty years of indifference to the charms of the many ladies whom he met professionally, eloped with a flaxen-haired, plain little woman, whose only attraction appeared to be her unlikeness to his wife.

With characteristic coolness he advised his friends of his change of address before taking the irrevocable step, having had his piano removed during his wife's absence from home, and carried on his business in his old way at his new home, where his new partner—Mrs Simmons by courtesy—managed their lodgers, their patrons, and Mr Simmons with strict impartiality.

The original Mrs Simmons, backed by the Law, compelled him to contribute towards her support and continued to occupy the house in Airy Street. Her sorrow—if it could be considered a sorrow to be rid of Mr Simmons—did not improve her character. Always intemperate in her love of amusement, she became intemperate in other ways, and developed a latent meanness.

Phosie had to give up her own dear little attic and sleep in a dark slip of a room at the top of the kitchen stairs. Having left school, for she was past fourteen, Mrs Simmons began to make her useful in the house. The hundred pounds was dwindling away, some of it having vanished with Mr Simmons, and Phosie found herself in the position of an unpaid servant.

Her sole duty in life was to save Mrs Simmons's steps, so she answered the door, waited on the lodgers, and ran the errands. There was no time to read, even if she had had any books, for her mistress was a born nigger-driver,

violent in wrath, as many lazily good-tempered people become, and thoroughly selfish.

Phosie's life was intolerable. A less buoyant nature would have been conquered by daily physical exhaustion, but the girl—child of her mother's independence of spirit and her father's persistence of effort—gained in strength of purpose as she gained in years. There was nothing of the willing martyr in her composition. If she adapted herself to her circumstances, prompt and obedient to her mistress and properly humble to the lodgers, she was nevertheless continually plotting freedom.

It was the weakness of little Gus, a fellow victim, that had kept her in slavery so long.

"Let us run away!" said Phosie, for the hundredth time during the past three months, on that warm May night when Mrs Simmons was not at home and she talked to her friend in the area.

"Where to?" asked Gus, his invariable question.

"Out of Airy Street, into the world," said Phosie. "I can't breathe here. I am tired of it—sick of it all."

"We've got to live," urged Gus. "We can't starve—'ungry, you know—awful!"

Phosie laid her hands on the boy's shoulders. He felt how strongly they gripped through his thin jacket.

"Won't you trust me, Gus?" she said. "I'll take care of you. You're all alone in the world, and so am I. We can work—I'm not afraid."

"You ain't very old," he argued. "I dunno what you could do—nor me neither."

"Oh, you'd get a job at once!" said Phosie, with the certainty of ignorance. "All you want is courage and determination. I'm not so very young. There are lots of people younger than I am. Lots of them are only babies. Think of that, Gus! I can do plain cooking, and I can dance."

Even Little Gus smiled at this.

"Dance!" he repeated scornfully. "Who'll pay yer? Dance! I could dance myself."

"Ah, but not like this!" said Phosie.

She suddenly stood on the very tips of her toes, spread out her arms and pattered round the area, straight as a dart from ankle to head. Then she gave a couple of high kicks, first with one foot then with the other, and if the people who disapprove of high kicking could have seen her they would have been obliged to confess that there was something very neat and dainty in the way the old beaded slipper flew into the air, twinkled on a level with Gus's head, and was back to earth before his start was over. She burst out laughing and dropped on the soles of her feet. Gus, after a vain attempt to balance on his toes in imitation, shook his head and shouldered his wooden tray.

"Who learned you?" he asked.

"I taught myself—it's nothing," said Phosie. "But it shows how well I could dance if I tried. I could go on the stage. I've saved a pound, and I've got that old necklace Miss Sapio gave me, and some rings which belonged to my mother, and my father's watch and chain and scarf-pin—no, I couldn't sell those, but all the others might go. The money would keep us both for months, Gus, till we got a job."

"I dunno!" said the boy for the second time.

These words expressed his whole attitude towards life. In after years he learned to say the same thing in different ways—"I really can't say," or "I haven't any idea," or "I would rather not give an opinion"—but the fact remained unaltered. Perhaps the modesty of his confession will not be overlooked in judging the character of Little Gus. Wiser men have come to the same conclusion—"Much as we know, what do we know?"

"You don't mind leaving your master and mistress, do you?" continued Phosie.

"Ne-ow!" said Gus, with supreme disgust at such an idea.

"You haven't got any relations, have you?" she asked.

The boy shook his head, and his worn, unchildish face suddenly twitched.

"Dunno know who I am—born work'us—no father—mother dead—no 'ome—no money—no friends!"

Those words determined her. His constant fear of facing a world, which she believed only waited to be won, had almost broken the ties of mutual loneliness which bound them together. But when he said he had no friends and no home, and she realised it was the truth, her young heart opened and took him in.

Little Gus—neglected, stunted, ill-born son of misery—from that hour was Phosie's brother.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADVENTURERS

IT was three days after their talk in the area, when Phosie had demonstrated her ability to dance for a living, that Little Gus agreed to run away.

An unmerited thrashing from his master, whose temper was spoilt by long experience of errand-boys, settled the question. Gus had not neglected his work, but he was naturally stupid, and his master was unable to discriminate.

He went to Phosie, sore and indignant, threw himself unconditionally into her hands, and received his marching orders.

They were to leave Airy Street on the following morning, meeting by agreement outside a certain sweet shop some distance away, and set out at once to conquer London.

Although Phosie no longer lived in the quaint world of her childhood, surrounded by imaginary pets and firmly believing in the existence of fairies—fairies who were as real to her as “the country” where they lived and which she had never seen—it only meant she had shifted her ground. She saw the streets and houses, not indeed under the spell of enchantment, but all in a haze of adventure and romance.

She and Little Gus were about to enter on a life of excitement and delight. They would forget Airy Street, work for their living, buy books, wander in the parks, win the love of innumerable friends, and make their fortunes. Beyond making their fortunes she did not speculate. There is nothing like being strictly practical.

Fortune favoured her on the day of liberation.

Mrs Simmons, who had been out to supper on the previous evening, did not get up to breakfast, leaving the lodgers to Phosie's care.

Having cooked the first-floor's bacon, made the second-floor's tea, and told the third-floor it was nearly eight o'clock, according to instructions, she packed her store of clothes into a bundle—poor Eddy Moore's heart would have ached to see that little bundle!—ate a piece of bread and butter, cleaned her shoes, and finally tapped at Mrs Simmons's door. Mrs Simmons grunted from within.

"Shall I get you your breakfast, Mrs Simmons?" said Phosie through the door.

"Come in, can't you?" said her mistress.

Phosie obeyed. The closeness of the air, the remains of a supper on a table, the look of the woman on the tumbled bed, gave her a minute of nausea. She recovered herself quickly and stood at the door, waiting for orders.

"Pull up the blind a bit, Phose, and take away that stale food. I don't think I can eat anything. My head's something awful this morning," said Mrs Simmons, yawning horribly.

The girl, with an effort mastering her repugnance to enter, raised the blind over the closely-bolted window and packed the tray, while Mrs Simmons pulled herself into a dirty flannel dressing-jacket and rubbed her face all over, regardless of features, like a baby.

"Shall I open the window a little, Mrs Simmons?" said Phosie, boldly. "It's very stuffy."

"Mind your own business!" said Mrs Simmons. "I don't want to be blown out of bed with the draught. You make me a strong cup o' tea and a round of buttered toast, and bring up the knuckle of ham. Look sharp!"

When Phosie returned she guessed, by the smell of brandy in the room, that her mistress had been indulging in the first drink of the day. She made the room as tidy as she could, and set the neat tray on a chair by the bed.

Mrs Simmons did not thank her, but she began to eat her breakfast with great energy for such a sufferer.

"Oh, my poor head!" she muttered at intervals, dragging shreds of meat off the knuckle with evident relish. "Oh, my poor, dear head!"

The girl smiled and looked at her from the door, with her mat of coarse black hair and flannel dressing-jacket open at the big throat, and that was the last she ever saw of Mrs Simmons.

Phosie filled the kettle and put it on the stove, ready for Mrs Simmons to wash up the breakfast things; filled the scuttle with coals; gave the cat a saucer of milk; made her own slip of a room tidy, and then put on her hat and little cape.

She wrote a few words of good-bye on a piece of paper and left it on the kitchen table. She had told Little Gus to do the same. Before leaving the house she ran upstairs and stealthily laid her face for a second against the door of the room where her father had slept. A pang of loneliness shot through her. She felt as if she were leaving him behind.

"Good-bye, my daddy!" she whispered to the closed door, patted it with her hand, and slipped noiselessly away.

It was a hot, sunny morning. Phosie closed the area door as quietly as she could, and hurried up the steps into the street.

A man was passing the house carrying a basket filled with roses, violets and other flowers. A whiff of delicate perfume swept over her face, forever after to be associated in her mind with the hour of freedom.

Phosie's eyes rested with delight on the confusion of soft but vivid colours, and her feet fairly danced along the pavement of Airy Street.

Two women, who were disputing in high-pitched voices at the corner, stopped as she passed and looked after her. She had given an absurd little caper, unable to check her-

self, and they both happened to see it. A laugh ended their quarrel.

A pretty child greeted her from the steps of a neighbour's house, and she stopped a second to exchange a kiss.

A young woman, plodding along with a barrow of vegetables, nodded good morning, although she had never seen Phosie before, and told her baby, enthroned on an old sack on top of the lettuces, to wave his hand.

She had never found the sky so blue or the sunshine so brilliant. It would not have surprised her if the stones had turned into gold. The rumble of more busy roads in the distance summoned her like martial music. The spirit of Adventure fired her blood.

Little Gus was waiting at the appointed spot. She burst out laughing when she saw him. He was leaning against a wall, his cap at the back of his head, and all his worldly possessions tied up in a bit of old blue apron. He looked a picture of human misery.

"Is there anything the matter, Gus?" said Phosie, trying to be sympathetic.

He sniffed loudly, it was a habit of his, and looked at his fellow-adventurer with rueful eyes.

"What's to 'appen next?" he asked.

Phosie confided her plans.

"We are going to find Mr and Mrs Dovey," she said. "They are old friends of mine. They used to live in our house, and when they went away Mrs Dovey gave me her address. She will tell us where to sleep, and perhaps we can live with them till we get some work to do."

"All right, but look 'ere! You won't catch me not goin' to another butcher—never!" said Little Gus.

"No, you must get something better than that," agreed Phosie.

They had started to walk down the street as they talked, but now Phosie stopped and laughed again.

"We're going back to Airy Street!" she exclaimed.

"That'll never do. Stop a minute while I look again where Mrs Dovey lives."

She took a carefully-folded letter out of her pocket, and held it for her companion to read at the same time.

"You see she lives in Hammersmith," said Phosie. "Now, I wonder where that is."

Little Gus suggested it might be near the Borough or Smithfield Meat Market, the only parts of London he seemed to have heard about.

They consulted a policeman, and Phosie listened carefully to his advice regarding trains or omnibuses. Gus stared helplessly up and down Edgware Road, too depressed to pay attention.

"We can walk a little now I know the way," said Phosie, and started off again at a brisk pace.

The policeman glanced after them. He was a serious, youthful Scotchman, so he knew a pretty girl when he saw one.

The open sweep of roads at Marble Arch, with the beautiful waving branches of the park beyond, captivated Phosie. She stood at the edge of the curb, absorbed in the continual threat of entanglement in the traffic, the never-ending movement in the scene.

Gus was much more interested in a deformed beggar, watching the unfortunate man's method of wriggling along on his hands and knees with morbid curiosity. He clutched Phosie's sleeve nervously as they crossed the busy road, but once within Hyde Park, westward bound, even Little Gus was moved to pleasure.

They walked on the grass, shaded by the leafy boughs, their unaccustomed eyes roving over the seemingly endless greensward, the vivid flower-beds and even paths.

They rested for half an hour within sight of the fountains in Kensington Gardens, and eagerly devoured a couple of buns which Phosie had bought in Edgware Road. Already it seemed a long, long time since they left Airy Street.

Mid-day found them at Hammersmith, slightly discouraged by having wandered out of their way in passing through Bayswater. Little Gus complained of fatigue. Phosie was obliged to spend another penny in refreshments.

It was a difficult matter to find the mean street from which Mrs Dovey had written. The boy began to lag behind, and even Phosie, undaunted as she was, felt ill at ease and a little nervous in the bustle and noise of unknown roads.

They strayed into a busy market, lined with fruit and vegetable stalls, where Little Gus pleaded for bananas, stared open-mouthed at a man doing a good trade with the latest penny novelties, and found horrible fascination in watching a boy skinning rabbits.

They were jostled into a crowded thoroughfare, where women with perambulators serenely wheeled their infants along the narrow pavement, all trying to be near the shop windows, regardless of the rules of the road.

It was with a sense of gratitude and relief, intensified by the knowledge that her old friends were at hand, that Phosie read the longed-for name on a gas-lamp at the corner of a little street of poor houses, with crowds of children of all ages playing about the pavement.

Quickly finding the number she wanted Phosie picked her way between two little boys who were engaged in sharing a large round sweet, of the kind vendored as "The Old Original English Bullseye," rolling it from one to the other along the ground between their sucks.

She knocked boldly at the open door. Gus remained in the street below, in charge of the bundles. After a lengthy pause a young woman appeared out of the darkness of the passage, and civilly asked her business.

"I want to see Mr and Mrs Dovey, if you please," said Phosie, her voice shaking with excitement.

"Dovey?" repeated the woman, vaguely. "I don't

know that name. You don't mean Saunders, or Levy, I suppose? "

"Oh, no!" said Phosie, quickly. "I mean Mrs Dovey. She's an old lady and her husband plays the cornet."

"They've gone!" broke in a shrill voice from the distance, belonging to a second woman, whose figure could be dimly discerned hanging over the banisters. "I know the people she means, Mrs Saunders. They've gone. They went a couple of months ago, before you moved in."

"They've gone," said the woman at the door, echoing the hopeless words in Phosie's ears.

"Do you know where they have gone?" she asked a little faintly.

"No!" said the shrill voice, with decision. "No idea, nor nobody else in the house. What did you want them for?"

"They were friends of mine, but it doesn't matter. Thank you!" said the girl, shrinking away from the sharp curiosity of the two women.

She walked briskly down the street, her head high, and Little Gus pattered along beside her.

"Well? Ain't we goin' in? What's up?" he asked breathlessly.

"Mr and Mrs Dovey are not there," she answered slowly. "We must do without them, Gus."

"Oh, Gawd!" groaned the boy.

Phosie seized upon his hand.

"It's all right, dear! Don't you be frightened," she said.

He sniffed more loudly than usual for a few minutes, clinging to her hand.

"I s'pose—we're goin' back again then?" he said.

"Oh, Gus!" exclaimed Phosie. "Back to Airy Street? Back to the old grind? Back to dirt and darkness? No! No!"

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE LILAC BUSH

THERE was a long, wide road in Hammersmith, very quiet and countrified in the days of Euphrosyne's girlhood, lying close to the river.

The houses were remarkable for an interesting variety, as if the builder, or probably many different builders, had been unable to decide whether rich or poor people should inhabit them.

They were all old-fashioned, but not sufficiently old to be attractive on that account. Some of them were semi-detached with fairly large balconies, and imposing, heavy porticoes; some of them were as small as cottages with a square of garden in front, and some were tall, thin houses with long flights of steps leading to the front doors.

Plane trees were planted in lines on either side of the road, and it was lighted by an insufficient number of gas lamps. A small row of shops, squeezed in among private houses near one end of the road, added to the convenience of the residents, if it somewhat offended their taste. They grumbled at the shops, but found them very useful.

There was the same variety in the gardens as in the houses. The spring was the time to see *The Stroll*, as this old road was called, at its best, for there was an exceptionally large number of flowering trees; laburnum rained its pale golden spray over the passers-by, hawthorn flung its honeyed scent into the air, and lilac bushes lifted their tiny towers of purple and white blossoms.

Towards the end of May the first freshness of the year was passed, for even *The Stroll* was not free from the

drought and dust of London streets in summer, but the plane trees were still at their best and the bushes in the gardens thick with foliage.

It was ten o'clock at night. The heat of the day had given place to a cool, quiet evening. One bright star trembled in the depths of a cloudless blue sky.

Phosie and her companion, dragging their way over Hammersmith Bridge, looked down the long curve of the river towards the dim, misty shores of the distant country.

It was high tide; the towing path was flecked with lights; factory chimneys and clustering roofs looked black and mysterious against the sky. To Phosie they were the unknown castles of her imagination. She forgot she was homeless in the pleasure of her day dream.

Following the course of the river as it wound into silence, she thought of green fields and sheltering trees, where all the flaring lights of the city would burn in the distance as feebly as the yellow lamp at the prow of a creeping barge. Then she seemed to hear the murmur and sobbing of the waves, the music of the wonderful sea she had never looked on. London was gone, and her gay little spirit danced on the open sands.

The feeble clutch of her companion's hand recalled her to reality. Little Gus no longer complained of their dreary flight. He was resigned to his fate, like a faithful dog limping at the heel of a master who had lost his way.

They had made several attempts to get into lodgings, but their extreme youth and evident poverty had only aroused curiosity and suspicion. Even when Phosie showed her money as a guarantee of good faith and honesty, she was confused and rebuffed by volleys of questions or sudden familiarity.

Several of the people at the poor houses where she had asked for accommodation had filled her with vague, instinctive dread. A man had followed them once during the afternoon and tried to make her speak to him, and the incident had shaken her nerve.

Gus was hopeless. He could only suggest "the work'us," and when Phosie refused to listen he began to talk about drowning himself.

Refreshed by some tea and bread and butter, which they bought at a stuffy little shop in a side street near the bridge, Phosie no longer ignored the truth.

"We shan't get a lodging to-night," she said, in a decided voice. "We must make up our minds to sleep out of doors."

"I dunno where," said Little Gus, staring miserably down the street.

"To-morrow morning I must look for work—I can clean steps anyway," she continued, desperately. "To-night we must hide ourselves. I don't care! My father often slept out of doors when he was a boy, tramping over the country with a little circus. Now, where shall we go? Where shall we go?"

Lines of anxiety and thought furrowed her childish brows for a few minutes, and then they cleared away and she smiled again.

"Do you remember that long road with trees on each side, Gus, where you took off your boot to see if your heel was blistered?" she asked.

He nodded his head.

"Let us go there!" said Phosie. "We can creep into one of those gardens under the bushes."

"Cops!" said Little Gus, unequal to more than the one alarming word.

"We must risk it!" she replied.

They made their way slowly to The Stroll. Little Gus, with aching limbs, would have taken up his quarters in the first shady garden they found, but Phosie was too prudent. She pulled him, feebly protesting, half down the road before discovering a promising shelter.

The windows of the house she picked upon were all dark, except for a faint gleam through the blind of a room which was partially underground,

The front garden was exceptionally broad and neglected. There was a holly tree beside the gate, and a straggling privet hedge divided it from the garden next door. The centre bed was a tangle of flowers and leaves which they could not distinguish in the darkness, and two large bushes, lilac and syringa, formed a dense screen against the right side of the house.

There was no one in sight. With the quickness of fear and excitement Phosie slipped through the open gate, still holding Gus, closed it behind her, and crept into the blackness of the bushes.

She laid her hand on the wall, stooped low, and gently forced her way under the mass of laden boughs. Gus followed, breathing hard, and making tiny whimpering sounds as the twigs flicked into his face.

"Hush!" whispered Phosie. "Be quiet!"

The ground felt damp. They could see nothing. She put her arm round him and they crouched down, protecting their eyes with their hands.

They remained in the same cramped position for several minutes, without speaking, afraid to stir. Then Phosie, finding they were safe so far, spread out the skirt of her dress as well as she could, sat on the ground, and drew Little Gus down beside her. A bright thought flashed across her desolation.

"It's like the Babes in the Wood!" she whispered.

An unexpected fear made the boy tremble more than ever.

"Think there's snakes?" he asked, touching the soft, cold earth.

"No, of course not!" she said.

"There is—always—in the country," he declared.

Phosie's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. She could make out the shapes of surrounding boughs, see the lines of the houses, and catch glimpses of sky over her head.

She pressed backward firmly into the centre of the bush,

drew her knees up to her chin, and again passed her right arm round Little Gus, drawing him close to her side.

The humid air smelt of earth; stray leaves tickled their necks, like the touch of swift fingers; they were pricked now and again by broken twigs; their breath was warm on each other's faces.

The street was very silent. Once a cab passed, the trip-clip-clop of the horse's hoofs ringing out clearly on the even road. A party of friends, returning from the local theatre, sounded terribly close with their laughter and talk to the unseen listeners. The gloomy singing of a half-drunken man, occasionally breaking out into loud, discordant notes, made them sick with fright. A policeman went by so quietly that they were as unconscious of him as he of them.

The slow hours dragged and the searching wind of night found them out; the bushes quivered as it breathed in the leaves, and the boy and girl shuddered as they felt it lifting their hair and stealing over their flesh.

"Cold!" whispered Little Gus.

Phosie, who was keenly alive to every sensation, understood his wretchedness, his complete surrender to physical discomfort, and pressed her cheek against his with something of the protecting, pitying tenderness a mother feels for her child.

"Try to go to sleep, dear!" she murmured. "I'll take care of you."

He whimpered a little more of the darkness and the cold, then his eyes closed and he nestled against her more closely, with his head upon her shoulder.

She was grateful he was asleep. Poor Little Gus! All the impatience with his helplessness she had suppressed during the day faded out of her mind. She thought of him, out of the depth of her fifteen years, as a child. She took upon herself the whole responsibility of what they had done, but it rested very lightly on her shoulders.

The irrepressible gaiety of her nature asserted itself

once more. The terrors of the first hours of concealment disappeared.

There was not a sound to be heard. She could plainly see the blue sky and the one bright star through the branches. The remembrance of the close rooms at Airy Street brought no regret.

Too young, too ignorant to realise the hardships and discouragements of life, Phosie was quite old enough to appreciate freedom. She had known what it was to be the victim of petty tyranny, and she saw in her companion the effects of suppression, overwork, and utter dependence on the will of others.

A feeling of strength, born of a day of courageous action, swept over her. It was her misfortune, not her fault, that her friends had disappeared. She recognised this, and refused to acknowledge failure.

Little Gus leaned against her heavily. One of her arms grew stiff and painful. She pulled it away, without waking him, and rubbed the cramped muscles into action. Then she treated her feet with the same vigour, slipping off her shoes for a few minutes to do it, till her fingers tingled and she felt aglow, even to the tips of her ears.

The wind was gone. Every leaf was still. Phosie's eyelids drooped. She gave a little sigh of forgetful ease and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI

EUPHROSYNE AND MR REVELL

WHEN Phosie opened her eyes, slowly and dreamily, the sun was slanting through the holly tree, the blackness of the garden had turned to green, and a warm breeze fanned her cheeks.

She stretched her stiffened limbs and shifted her shoulder from the weight of Little Gus. The boy awoke at the same time, rubbed his eyes, yawned, squirmed about in his clothes, and looked up at Phosie.

"'Ullo! Slep' well?" he asked, as if it were the most ordinary thing in life to pass the night sitting on the ground under a lilac bush.

It was nearly seven o'clock. The street was noisy with milk carts, while an energetic boy, delivering newspapers, was banging every gate he passed through as an accompaniment to the whistle of a popular tune with which he beguiled his morning labours.

"Oh, I'm glad it's day!" exclaimed the girl, fervently.

She cautiously rose to her feet, stooped forward and peered through the bush. The next instant she jumped back again, treading on Little Gus's toes, as the stillness of the garden was broken by the violent, excited yelping of a small Welsh terrier.

He had caught a glimpse of her, and, after the manner of puppies, proclaimed his discovery to all within hearing. Scuttling through the grass, he made a rush at the bush, barking with all his might. Phosie laughed, in spite of her alarm, and Little Gus gave vent to one of his late master's favourite oaths.

"What's the matter with the dog? Taffy! Taffy! Come 'ere!" exclaimed a woman, whose opening of the front door had enabled the puppy to escape from the house.

She was a little woman, neatly dressed in a black gown, with a duster tied over her head and a door mat in her hands.

"Taffy! Taffy! What have you got? Is it a cat?" she said, and, putting down the mat, took a step on to the grass.

Taffy retreated a little from the bush, barking himself sideways in his unnecessary excitement, and Phosie appeared between the leaves, closely followed by Little Gus.

They all three stared at one another in blank dismay. The boy and girl knew they were discovered. The woman was too surprised at their sudden appearance to say a word. Taffy made the day hideous with piercing yelps.

"I am very sorry—we haven't done any harm—we've only been sleeping under your bush—" stammered Phosie.

"Sleeping—under—our—bush! All night? Under the lilac bush?" repeated the little woman in gasps.

"Yes, but we'll go away at once—we're very honest people—we're not thieves," answered Phosie. "Don't be angry with us! We're not burglars, truly!"

The words had a most unexpected effect on her astonished listener.

The little woman threw back her head and gave an uncouth, short squeal of laughter, almost as painful to hear as the terrier's barks.

"No, you don't look like burglars, either of you!" she exclaimed. "You poor children! You must see the master. I never heard of such a thing—sleeping under our lilac bush—good 'eavens!"

She turned towards the house. Phosie, bewildered and dazzled in the sunshine, pulled Little Gus after her.

"Let's cut! She'll send for a cop!" he whispered.

Phosie took no notice of his words. They followed the woman into a dark, square hall, and down a steep flight of stairs into a kitchen at the back of the house, with the dog scuttling in front of them.

The kitchen was plainly, but cheerily furnished, with a row of geraniums in pots on a table by the window, and a loud-ticking cuckoo clock hanging on one side of the fireplace.

Just as they entered the room it struck seven and the mechanical bird, to their surprise, came out of his little house, said "Cuck!" and vanished, to reappear a second later with a loud "Coo!" after which he finally banged his door. Their conductress gave another of her peculiar laughs.

"It's broke," she explained, "but the master won't have it mended. He says it's the only interesting cuckoo he's ever met with living in a clock. He calls it a blithe newcomer, but I call it a gay old bird."

After a minute's hesitation, as if she doubted the prudence of leaving them alone with the spoons, she asked Phosie and her companion to step into a small back yard, where there were a couple of old chairs, and "make themselves comfortable."

They sat there for nearly an hour, closely watched by Taffy, who seemed to consider himself their keeper, and occasionally cheered by a friendly nod through the glass door from the little woman as she went about her household duties.

Little Gus passed the time in sniffing and shuffling his feet. Phosie tried to fix her mind on plans for the future.

At eight o'clock they were given a slice of bread and butter each, while a savoury smell of coffee and fried bacon from the kitchen stove made the boy positively writhe with envy.

Soon afterwards the little woman opened the door and beckoned them.

"The master's name is Mr Revell," she said. "I've told him about you and he says you're both to go in."

Leading the way from the kitchen to the breakfast-room, also partially underground, she tapped at the door, opened it without waiting for an answer, and stood on one side for them to enter.

Phosie, with heightened colour and a choking sensation of dryness in the mouth, went into the room first, Little Gus shrinking behind her.

It was dim and sombre, for the sunshine could hardly penetrate through the trees and bushes of the garden. Phosie's first impression was of heavy furniture, quantities of pictures and ornaments, and a general effect of rich, if gloomy, colouring.

A big table, placed near the window, was half covered by a white cloth, on which the breakfast was arranged, the other half being piled with books and papers.

The man who sat at this table rose as they entered, moved by curiosity to look at them closely, for his housekeeper had given a highly-coloured description of the way they had leapt out of the lilac bush—like a couple of hunted tigers, she said, foaming at the mouth.

He was a tall man of something beyond middle age, spare in figure, with a grey, thin beard, wisps of hair brushed forward from the back of his head, a big nose, and singularly bright eyes gleaming through gold-rimmed spectacles.

He fidgeted abstractedly with the things on the table as he bent forward. His hands were long and bony, and he wore several big, old-fashioned rings.

"Now then—now then—you ought not to hide under my lilac bush!" he began nervously. "I was astonished to hear about it from my housekeeper. What do you mean by it? Who are you, little people? Where do you come from?"

Phosie, who suddenly found herself trembling, advanced to the table, steadied herself by resting one hand

on it, and returned Mr Revell's close scrutiny. She was pale and heavy-eyed; her brown, wavy hair was dishevelled; she had taken off her hat and held it in her hand; her shabby little cape was crushed and dusty.

She was a deplorable little figure, dirty and untidy, but as she looked into his face, with the irresistible appeal of youth and innocence, he was suddenly moved to pity and interest and pleasure. He pitied her physical weakness, he was unexpectedly interested in what she had to say, but the sensation of pleasure was the strongest feeling of all.

He had dreaded pathos, but there was no hint of a tear on her lashes, and her lips curved up and not down at the corners, and that is a little detail that makes all the difference in the world when a mouth begins to quiver.

Phosie was rapidly debating in her own mind the policy of telling him the truth at once, and this was the reason of the long silence before she answered his question.

"We have run away," she said at last, "but it doesn't matter, for we have no relations or anybody else to worry about us."

"Is the boy your brother?" asked Mr Revell.

"No, but I am his only friend. Let me tell you about him! May I tell you what we have done?"

"Well, well! Be quick about it!" said Mr Revell.

He dropped back into his chair, dipping the salt spoon in and out of the salt while Phosie talked. She told her tale well, and she told him the absolute truth.

Mr Revell kept his eyes fixed on her face. When she had finished and stopped, breathlessly, timidly waiting for his verdict on their flight, he looked at Gus for the first time.

"I understand your motives for running away from Airy Street," he said in a kinder tone. "But why bring the boy?"

Little Gus shuffled from one foot to the other, sniffed, and smeared his face with his cuff.

"Why on earth bring that boy?" repeated Mr Revell, quite unmoved by Little Gus's shyness and discomfort.

He looked at him curiously, as if the boy were an interesting, but slightly unpleasant, beetle.

Phosie turned and looked at him too. The question struck home. For a minute she marvelled at her own stupidity, but the next, ashamed of the thought, she threw her arms impetuously round Little Gus and held him close.

Gus, after a second's struggle for freedom, burst into tears and clasped her round the neck, hiding his face against her shoulder.

"Pray don't let us have a scene!" said Mr Revell.

He rose, pushing back his chair noisily, rang a small bell on the breakfast-table, and began to fidget among the books and papers. The housekeeper entered.

"Have you seen a little book bound in red morocco, Mrs Bird?" he asked, helplessly. "I am sure I brought it home last night."

Mrs Bird, after glancing questioningly at the boy and girl, began to search, with more bustle, but as aimlessly as Mr Revell himself. Phosie's quick eyes caught sight of the little book bound in red morocco under his chair. She picked it up. He smiled at her gratefully.

"Mrs Bird, I want these young people to stop here to-day," he said, pulling on his light overcoat, which the housekeeper had brought in on her arm. "Perhaps you'll make them comfortable? It may be very injudicious, but I believe their story. I am confident that this girl has told me the truth. Truth, Mrs Bird, is occasionally as strange as fiction. Treat them, if you please, kindly, but don't let them touch anything."

He said the last words very emphatically.

"Oh, how good you are!" exclaimed Phosie, quickly putting Gus on one side and drawing close to Mr Revell. "But I think we ought to look for work and get a lodging. I—I suppose you don't want a servant, do you? I'm

very strong, and I'm sure that Gus would be able to clean windows and knives very carefully, and so could I. We'll do anything you tell us—any hard work—and indeed, indeed we're honest."

"I don't know—I don't know—perhaps Mrs Bird can make you useful," said Mr Revell. "You can sleep here to-night, if Mrs Bird can pack you in—you must settle it all with Mrs Bird. Poor child! Poor child! Now, don't talk to me—I'm late already—and it agitates me to be talked to—good-bye! Good-bye!"

He put on his hat, gathered up his gloves, the *Times*, and his walking-stick, and made for the door.

Phosie, too amazed at his goodness to utter any words of ordinary thanks, sprang forward as he opened it, and seized him by the hand.

"May we stop here to-night? May I work for you?" she cried.

"Yes, yes, yes, but don't worry!" said Mr Revell, irritably. "You can stop here as long as you like, if you learn to be quiet and reasonable. Do as Mrs Bird tells you—and make that boy wash his face."

With these words, accompanied by kind, abstracted backward glances through his gleaming spectacles, Mr Revell left Euphrosyne and Little Gus in possession of a home.

Although he was the least impulsive of human beings, intellectual, cool, conservative in habit and thought, it was not the first time, or the second or the third, that Henry Revell had done an unworldly, generous deed. Very few people suspected this trait in his character, and, like most men of his type, he was far too modest, and a little ashamed, to have it known.

CHAPTER VII

A HOUSE OF GLOOM

HENRY REVELL held an important post at the British Museum.

His whole life had been devoted to the study of Art treasures; he was one of the best judges of pottery in England, and absorbed in his work.

An Oxford man, son of a clergyman, he had never cared to be wealthy, even if the support of a widowed mother and younger sister, for all the years of his early manhood, had not drained his purse. His only brother, a handsome ne'er-do-weel, had emigrated to Canada, leaving Henry with all the family responsibilities, and only communicating with his people to ask for remittances.

Henry Revell, who had never desired, as far as his family knew, to marry, lived for many years in quiet rooms in Bayswater, but a couple of years before the advent of Phosie he had taken one of the oldest, dullest houses in The Stroll, Hammersmith.

His principal reason for moving being a long-cherished desire to display his collection of pottery, it was not surprising that the best rooms in the house should be devoted to the little museum. He possessed the true nature of the connoisseur, but much as he knew of intrinsic values, he had often shown both originality and even a quaint, whimsical fancy in his own purchases.

Of trained and severe taste, combined with keen judgment in his professional work at the British Museum, at home he took delight in the simplest pleasures. He had travelled extensively in bygone years; but the new life

of the old lands had utterly failed to turn him into the modern man of modern ideas.

The picture-galleries, the museums, the ancient buildings of cities were the only points he cared to remember. London itself was the London to him of Johnson and Swift, of Addison and Steele. He talked of the Burney family in Soho Square as if they were personal friends. Dickens and Thackeray were his up-to-date novelists. He chuckled over John Leech's pictures as if they had just appeared in the current *Punch*, and he looked on the æstheticism of the eighties as a very promising movement of the minute.

Little Mrs Bird, to whom he had grown accustomed in his Bayswater rooms, where she had been employed as cook, gratefully accepted the post of housekeeper at the house in The Stroll. Naturally of a cheerful disposition, she tried hard to adapt herself to her new surroundings, but her bustling ways and well-meaning officiousness jarred on Mr Revell, although it would never have entered his head to dismiss her.

She possessed the supreme virtue in his eyes of never touching his curiosities. When it was necessary to clean a room he himself removed the pottery, pictures and books before going to the Museum in the morning, and returned them to their places when he got home at night.

His intimate friends were all men of his own tastes and standing, learned men, and his greatest dissipation was to entertain them and their wives, a couple at a time, to a very quiet dinner at a certain old-fashioned restaurant where Mr Revell himself lunched every day.

On rare occasions he invited some of his younger friends—shy, well-schooled girls for the most part—to tea at his house. Then Mrs Bird was requested to provide seed cake and gingerbread, Mr Revell being under the delusion that these were considered luxuries by all young people.

He lived very plainly himself, his only extravagance

being a bottle now and again of exceptionally good wine. He smoked, read a great deal, and kept up a voluminous correspondence on literary subjects with two old college friends.

One of them was his junior by several years, so Mr Revell invariably mentioned him as "young Joe Ridgeway," although he had been in business for nearly a quarter of a century, lived in the South of France, and paid a visit to England at intervals of about eight or ten years.

The second, happening to be Mr Revell's senior by a few months, was known as "old Herbert Palgrave," and excused, on the score of age, from travelling as far as London, although he only lived in Surrey.

Phosie and Little Gus, left alone with the housekeeper in their unexpected refuge, at once tried in their different ways to make a good impression.

The girl helped Mrs Bird wash the dishes and tidy the bedrooms, while Gus, on his own initiative, took the kitchen scuttle into the cellar and managed to hurt himself rather badly by tumbling down the steep stairs, not to mention allowing the terrier to accompany him, a kindness which Taffy especially appreciated, as he had been washed on the previous day.

"I can put you to sleep in the little box room at the top of the house, next to mine," said Mrs Bird to Phosie. "But the boy must have a bed downstairs. I don't suppose you mind sleeping in the basement, do you, boy?"

She led the way to a narrow room, half filled with packing cases and with a dreary window overlooking the unkempt garden. Little Gus, who had been accustomed to sleeping in a back kitchen, in company with black-beetles and mice, was delighted with his new apartment, and eagerly helped to move the packing cases and put up a chair bedstead. When an old washstand had been found in the cellar, and a chair added from the kitchen, he looked round with great satisfaction.

"Cosy!" he said. "Fine! What's all the boxes for?"

"The master packed his treasures in them," explained the housekeeper. "Don't you touch them."

Phosie's room was almost as sparsely furnished, but she cried with joy to call it hers. Her gratitude to Henry Revell was painful to bear; no words could express it; it positively made her heart ache.

Mrs Bird was a great talker, and, when she was out of her master's hearing, a great laughers. She entertained Phosie with lengthy stories of herself, her late husband, and all her relations. Being used to the sole society of Taffy and a cat, she found it most exciting to have a human being for a listener.

Mr Revell returned to dinner at seven o'clock. When Phosie heard the click of his key in the door she stood still on the stairs, happening to be descending at that minute from the room where she was to sleep, at the top of the house, overcome with shyness.

Her impulse was to run away, but after a minute to pull herself together, she boldly advanced and met him in the hall. He peered at her curiously, for the gas was turned low, and he could not see her face.

"Oh, the little girl!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten you for the minute. Yes! Well, you haven't run away again?"

"You speak as if running away were a habit of mine," she answered, unable to keep from smiling out of sheer pleasure at seeing him smile.

"So it is, isn't it?" he said. "How do I know you haven't run away from half a dozen schools as well as from Airy Street? You don't speak like a general servant at a lodging-house. I think you are playing me a trick. I believe you're a fairy princess in disguise!"

Vastly amused at his little joke, Mr Revell led her by the hand down into the breakfast-room, where the table was set for his dinner. He looked at her long and search-

ingly. Washed, brushed, and refreshed by food and sleep, she had lost the abject look which had touched his heart in the morning.

Her eyes were brimming over with tears—clear, dark-fringed, grey eyes—and her usually smiling mouth quivered with unspoken words of gratitude. But even at that emotional minute, that was not half so alarming as her new friend had anticipated, there was something baffling in Phosie's expression. The spirit that possessed so fair a dwelling was an unchangeably mischievous, happy, illusive spirit—a spirit of mirth.

"I'm rather a lonely man," said Mr Revell, slowly. "But if you can be content to stop here, Euphrosyne—you see I remember your Greek name—I will do my best to take care of you. Indeed, I am honoured by your presence," he continued whimsically. "You are the namesake of the most gracious of the Three Graces, a daughter of Zeus and Eurynome, sister of Aglaia and Thalia; and do you know that Euphrosyne was descended from the most ancient deities of all, born of the ocean, the earth, and the air. I wonder whether you can be trusted."

"I'll always tell you the truth—" she began earnestly, but he interrupted quickly.

"I mean, trusted not to smash anything," said Mr Revell. "Now, Mrs Bird is a treasure, quite a treasure, but utterly unreliable. As careless as a child of a year old."

"Do give me a chance!" pleaded Phosie. "I have very safe fingers. I never remember breaking any of Mrs Simmons's crockery. Now Little Gus—"

"Little Gus? Is that the boy?" asked Mr Revell. "I wouldn't allow him to handle any of my things for the world. He's got hands like a frog's feet—like starfish—they make me shudder. I don't want to see him again."

"If he goes away, I must go," said Phosie, blanching at the thought.

Mr Revell took off his spectacles and polished them thoughtfully on his coloured silk handkerchief. Then he put them on again and Phosie's anxious face came into focus. He was almost blind without glasses.

"If Mrs Bird can make him useful he can stop, but I can't have him on the same footing as yourself, Euphrosyne," he said, with a touch of severity. "He is one of those undeveloped creatures whose proper place is a glass bottle in a laboratory, something between the monkey and the man, without the quickness of the one or the possibilities of the other. He ought not to have been born, that's the real truth of the matter."

"Oh, Mr Revell!" cried Phosie.

"Well, my dear child, he is your property, not mine. I regard him in the same light as the terrier. He is quite at liberty to live in the house, if he doesn't make a noise or worry me."

Phosie, with one little sigh of regret, accepted the situation.

Nobody wanted Little Gus. All the more reason that she should cherish him.

"Have you seen over the house?" asked Mr Revell.

"Only the little room on the top floor, the box-room, and Mrs Bird's bedroom," replied Phosie.

"I will show you everything myself to-morrow morning," he said.

The following day was Sunday. Mr Revell, according to his invariable custom, breakfasted half an hour later and ate a poached egg on toast instead of his usual porridge. He preferred porridge, but his old landlady in Bayswater having established the egg precedent he had mentioned it to Mrs Bird, as a matter of course, when first engaging her services.

At about ten o'clock he rang the bell for Phosie, who instantly appeared.

She had neatly plaited her long hair and wore one of the housekeeper's aprons over her old frock. In her bodice she had pinned a small bunch of wild roses from a neglected bush in the garden. Mr Revell was as much surprised to hear they grew in his own garden as he would have been if she had appeared with the rarest orchid and told him the same fact.

He gravely led the way upstairs, and ushered her into the largest room in the house on the ground floor. The blinds were lowered; there was a peculiarly close, but not unpleasant smell, suggestive of cedar wood; the folding doors between the front and back rooms had been removed, and the floor was covered with dark linoleum.

Mr Revell pulled up the blinds. Phosie found herself surrounded by rare and beautiful works of art. Down the centre of the rooms, reaching from end to end, was a three-storied table, or stand, laden with pottery.

The walls were hung with china plates and old, flat dishes; a couple of high cases, with glass doors, stood on either side of the front room, and in the back room was an ancient spinet. Mounting guard over the empty grate, which was most inappropriately filled with a bright green paper "waterfall"—Mrs Bird's purchase—was a tall Chinese stork in bronze, over six feet high, and in one corner was a finely-wrought suit of armour, looking, with its closed visor, like a real man in the shadows.

The front room on the floor above was even more crowded with antique treasures, which had overflowed into Mr Revell's bedroom behind it, and even the staircase was adorned with quaint and curious "finds" of the collector—barbarous weapons, old prints, strange garments, Japanese scrolls, framed samplers.

It was like a new world to Phosie, or rather the old world of a fairy tale, where everything she touched had its history to unfold.

Her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom. Mr Revell's bony fingers, grasping her warm little hand, guided her

through the old furniture and round the laden cases. Slowly the beauty of form in vase and vessel made itself felt, and the lurking loveliness of colour grew out of the darkness.

He lifted down a piece of Derby china, comparing the rich gros-blue and deep pink, but her eyes wandered in greater admiration to the flush of the rose in a Sèvres vase.

"Very pretty! Very pretty!" agreed Mr Revell. "But look at this little casket, Euphrosyne. Here's a jewel box for a runaway princess!"

It was in three shades of amber, decorated with figures in carved ivory, the work of a cunning Sicilian. Phosie was allowed to open it, Mr Revell's fingers hovering over hers, while he murmured a prolonged—"Careful! Careful!" Within the casket lay a quaint Chinese chate-laine of silver and pale jade.

He drew it out and held it against her side, while the young girl's thoughts flew to an old-world satin gown, with a lace fichu round her shoulders and mittens to her elbows. She gave a laugh of pleasure, glancing down at the captivating chatelaine.

"We're getting frivolous!" said Mr Revell.

So he returned the glowing casket to its shelf and showed her a plaque of white biscuit.

"Best specimen of Bristol work," he said. "And here's a rare bit of Worcester—look at it, Euphrosyne! The colour of lapis-lazuli, adorned with floral sprays—only look at it!"

Phosie obeyed in admiring silence. Mr Revell's eyes beamed through his spectacles, but it was not wholly artistic appreciation of his rare bit of Worcester. He had snapped it up for a mere song when it was neglected and overlooked, by some mischance, at one of the biggest auction rooms in London. That was a fact never to be forgotten. He had told the story dozens of times, and he told it again to Phosie, chuckling and gloating over his bargain.

This led him to descriptions of memorable sales in Paris, Berlin, Vienna; old anecdotes of art collectors; his personal "discoveries"; the strange vicissitudes of famous pictures; the rare charm of cameos and intaglios; the beauty of enamels—Mr Revell was the happy possessor of eighteenth-century specimens of the delicate Bilston and Battersea work—the value of early Chelsea porcelain; the unending interest in old silver—so his talk rambled on and on and on.

Phosie listened with closest attention; once or twice the quiet rooms were filled with her gay laughter, and she learned, in a single lesson, to appreciate the unswerving patience, the innate refinement, the fine training of eye and taste which distinguish such men as Henry Revell.

The cases which she had noticed, on first entering the biggest rooms, were filled with his collection of scent bottles and powder boxes, together with a number of small Chinese bronzes. These pretty things delighted Phosie, and Mr Revell, after much hesitation, allowed her to lift them off the narrow shelves—delighted, in his turn, by the firmness and care with which she handled them.

"What small, dainty fingers!" he exclaimed, as she turned and twisted a silver-gilt pendant scent-case, with enamelled pansies on a white ground.

"Will you trust me to touch all your things?" asked Phosie.

The worried expression, that had been absent all the morning, returned to Mr Revell's face.

"I don't know. I really can't say," he answered. "Young people are so very reckless. You must give me time to make up my mind, my dear child, for I never do anything in a hurry. Although I live in the rush and fuss of modern life it doesn't suit me at all. I ought to have been born in another era—say the fourteenth century. Then I should have gone into a monastery, I expect, and spent my life illuminating missals."

"I wonder what he means by the modern rush and fuss?" thought Phosie.

The house was absolutely quiet, for Mrs Bird had strict orders to keep the kitchen door shut, to save her master from the sound of her voice or Taffy's occasional barking.

The dark breakfast-room was dull and sunless. Mr Revell, after thoroughly polishing his spectacle glasses, a habit of his which Phosie already knew, selected a book from the shelves, opened it at a particular page, and passed it to the girl.

"Read aloud, my dear, if you don't object," he said. "Read slowly and mind your stops."

The book was *Marcus Aurelius*, and Phosie, only too pleased to do anything he asked, began to read. Before she had turned half a dozen pages Mr Revell was fast asleep. Made aware of the fact by the sound of a gentle snore, she ventured to raise her eyes and saw that his body had sunk low in his chair, and his spectacles nearly to the end of his nose. He looked very old, and his hands, with their yellow nails and heavy gold rings slipping down to the knuckles, were the colour of old parchment.

Phosie read on mechanically, and the words dropped from her lips with no expression beyond the unconscious, incomplete music of youth in her voice:

"Time is like a rapid river, and a rushing torrent of all that comes and passes. A thing is no sooner well come, but it is past; and then another is born after it, and this too will be carried away. Whatever happens is as common and well known as a rose in the spring, or an apple in autumn."

For two hours she went on reading, and at intervals Mr Revell awoke, nodded and smiled if she happened to glance at him, pushed up his spectacles and slept again.

When the housekeeper entered with the tray for early dinner, he took the book out of Phosie's hand and marked the place with a strip of postcard—all postcards he re-

ceived were cut into strips for this purpose—and returned it to the shelf.

“Whatever you do, never turn down the page of a book,” he said to her. “There is only one deeper insult you can offer to the great body of craftsmen who print our books, and that is to wet your thumb when you turn the leaves. Remember that, Euphrosyne!”

Phosie left him carving his little joint of roast mutton and went towards the kitchen, to dine with Mrs Bird and Little Gus.

The back door was open and Taffy was tearing round the garden. Phosie stepped out into the sunshine. It was past two o'clock. She blinked and shaded her eyes with one hand.

The grass was long and unkempt, and the flower-beds overgrown with weeds. A giant wild convolvulus twined about the privet hedge from end to end, here and there flaunting a lovely blossom.

The house behind her was a house of gloom, in spite of all its treasures, and she suddenly felt like a prisoner set free. After one swift glance at the blank windows, she spread out her arms, as Little Gus had seen her do in the area at Airy Street, and danced down the garden on the tips of her toes, swinging and swaying to an unheard melody in her own brain.

On reaching the broken-down wall, at the farther end, she stopped dancing and gathered a handful of dandelions and puff balls, childishly blowing the seeds into the air, where they floated like fairy feathers.

Then she began to romp with the dog, snatching up the old rubber ball he had dropped at her feet and keeping it just high enough to tempt him to crazy leaps, then stooping down and teasing him by little darts and rushes, while Taffy, in a frenzy of delight, jumped from side to side, barked and gasped, his eyes brimming over, his red tongue hanging out, every wiry hair on his body quivering.

Away flew the ball and they both gave chase, the terrier

winning by the length of a paw, but before he could get a grip on the prize the girl had snatched it away and was kneeling down in front of him, with the ball flying from hand to hand, and all the splendid sport—the teasing, the toss, the chase, the possession—began over again. Taffy had not enjoyed himself so much in all his puppy days.

Phosie gave the ball a final spin to the end of the garden, when she was tired out, and danced once more down the grassy, gravel path. Then she smoothed away the hair blown over her eyes, pressed her lips demurely together, and re-entered the house in a slow, dignified manner.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW THE YEARS PASSED

“ I DUNNO what to do—upon my word, I dunno! ”
said Little Gus.

“ What are you talking about, dear? ” asked Phosie, turning round from the case where she was arranging Mr Revell’s scent bottles.

She had been cleaning the case and was now returning them to their narrow shelves. It was a dainty task and had been the subject of several conversations between Phosie and her guardian. He had always been accustomed to placing the Chinese specimens on the top shelves; she was in favour of giving the quaint English patch-boxes the place of honour.

Mr Revell had gone to his work that morning in a pleasurable state of uncertainty. He had grown to rely on her good taste, but at the same time there was no getting over the fact that the Chinese specimens had looked remarkably handsome on the top shelves!

Little Gus had suddenly appeared at the door, while the important change was in progress, with a book in his hand. He had not overcome the habit of sniffing, perhaps because he always managed to stand in a draught, and was very rarely without a cold, passing off or about to develop.

“ I dunno what to make of it. I can’t get it fundamentally! ”

He said the last word twice, for Little Gus, having got beyond the monosyllabic conversation of his early youth,

was inclined to repeat any long words he could remember in and out of season. He had heard Mr Revell say "fundamentally" a few days before, asked Phosie to look it out for him in the dictionary, and promptly tried its effect on Mrs Bird by remarking that fundamentally potatoes were more digestible than turnips.

Phosie put down the fine silk handkerchief with which she dusted the shelves, and crossed the room. His book was a small, dog's-eared Primer of English grammar.

"What is it you can't grasp?" she asked, kindly.

Little Gus, who was exactly like the Little Gus of the old days grown taller, dragged his thumb comprehensively down the open page.

"All of it, Phosie, adverbs and aj'tives and this here parsing, can't make head or tail of it. Frin'stance, why don't they tell you when to say 'was' and when to say 'were'?"

"They do tell you, Gus. Let me find the place."

Phosie pulled a couple of chairs close together and they sat down side by side.

It was the quiet hour of the afternoon, devoted by the girl to the care of Mr Revell's little museum, and by the boy to laborious preparation of the lessons she had arranged for him in the morning.

Gus's education had cost her a great deal of thought, for although Mr Revell treated him kindly and he earned his living by steady work in house and garden, Little Gus was an object of indifference, if not of positive dislike, to their patron.

Three years had passed since the flight from Airy Street. Lonely, happy, unchanging years!

Phosie had lived in a world of books. Enchanted as she was by poetry and romance, legend and folk lore, her reading had not been confined to these fascinating subjects. It was characteristic of Mr Revell that he should

combine the strictest ideas of mid-Victorian propriety concerning the behaviour of young ladies with absolute catholicity in regard to their books.

As Eddy Moore had trusted Phosie not to burn her fingers in lighting the gas, so Mr Revell trusted her not to hurt herself, in a deeper sense, with base or pernicious reading. Humour was the quality, so rarely appreciated by a young girl, which appealed to Phosie in the printed page. It was not that she always wanted to be laughing, but that her amusement was so genuine, so hearty, so quick in response to wit or pleasure, that it struck the keynote of her character.

She had none of the ordinary interests of a girl of her age—games, schoolfellows, dress or accomplishments. Mrs Bird had taught her to cook, but she had long outstripped her mistress, and Mr Revell's menu was no longer confined to chops all the week and a joint of roast mutton on Sunday.

Much of her time was devoted to the garden; at first it seemed a hopeless task, for the unconquerable weeds fought for their existence inch by inch. Little Gus and Euphrosyne, with dogged patience, dug and delved. Their labour was rewarded, the first summer after they lived in The Stroll, by a few handfuls of nasturtiums, a goodly crop of marigolds, and as many pansies and double daisies as six pennyworth of roots could supply.

Mr Revell, the following spring, presented Phosie with a sovereign to spend on garden tools. It was his first gift and it filled her with joyful surprise. Her assistant gardener's pleasure was almost as great.

"Think what we can do with twenty shillings! ' said Phosie.

Little Gus proposed building a hothouse, refusing to see any difficulty in supplying Covent Garden with grapes and tomatoes.

Shortly afterwards, without any preliminary remark,

Mr Revell put two more golden coins into Phosie's hand.

"Buy yourself a new jacket!" he said, and hurried away, before she could thank him.

Mr Revell meant to include all necessary garments in the word "jacket."

From that time forward he gave her five shillings every week, but as she had to clothe Little Gus as well as herself, for it never occurred to their protector to give anything to the boy, it was impossible for her to save any money. But that did not trouble Phosie in the least, for she had inherited none of her father's dread of poverty.

She had no friends, except the little girl next door, a round-faced, flaxen-haired doll of a child, several years younger than herself, whom she admired and loved. Her name was Lily Parlow. The only child of middle-aged parents, she was a spoilt, selfish little creature, to whom her mother talked as if she were a woman, who read the newspapers aloud to her father, and who possessed an amazing knowledge of the names and private affairs of popular actors and actresses. Mrs Parlow reminded Phosie of poor Mrs Simmons of Airy Street in her passion for the theatre.

The days followed one another, at the gloomy house in The Stroll, like sombre beads slipping down a string, every one just like the last.

Phosie rose early and helped Mrs Bird, breakfasted with Mr Revell, when he usually held forth on such topics as Evolution, Egyptian Mythology, the recent discoveries in chemistry, or the early history of the Christian Church; and spent the remainder of the morning in housework, teaching Gus, and gardening.

In the afternoon she read and went for a walk, unless there was any sewing to be done or Lily Parlow wanted to be amused. When Mr Revell returned he always found her waiting for him, a quiet, attentive listener, quick of step and soft of voice.

They dined together, and in the evening Phosie read aloud, or they played chess, or she wrote from his dictation—long, discursive letters to his two old college friends in France and Surrey.

There was no variety in Mr Revell's letters; they always began in the same way, "My dear Joe" to the business man in France, and "My dear Herbert" to the professional man in Surrey, and ended with the cold words, "Yours faithfully, Henry R. Revell."

He was never demonstrative. Phosie had insensibly adapted her character to his, suppressing her natural gaiety as much as she possibly could, and trying to look at the world as he did through his gold-rimmed spectacles as a great museum, a school of thought, a grave old world full of records of the past.

She was never unhappy, or even melancholy, but at times she was conscious of a subtle restraint, as if her spirit—the spirit of the innermost—were lost in a grey mist.

Little Gus, as he pored over his English grammar on the summer afternoon when Phosie was arranging Mr Revell's scent-bottles, looked, as he felt, a hopeless failure. Three years of good living and care had indeed improved his appearance; he was not so thin; the haggard, unboyish expression had left his face; but his weak eyes and narrow brow, his mouth always a little open, and the vague, questioning, puzzled lines on his forehead, were all suggestive of the undeveloped, narrow mind.

There was no obstinacy in Gus and no imagination. Mr Revell, as has been said already, ignored his existence. Mrs Bird treated him like a child, and even Miss Lily Parlow snubbed and laughed at him.

Although he was growing quickly, like one of his own unsuccessful, weedy sunflowers, all stalk and no beauty, everybody called him "Little Gus." Phosie, on discovering that he did not remember, if he had ever known, his surname, had decided to choose one for him.

She found it difficult to make up her mind whether it should be Stewart or Cromwell, her admiration being divided at the time between Charles I. and the Lord Protector.

Gus was quite indifferent, and after his suggestion of Potts as an alternative—his former master, the butcher, had been Mr Potts—he meekly agreed to adopting both names, and learned the meaning of the hyphen.

“Augustus Stewart-Cromwell” was pleasing to Phosie’s ear and her sense of humour, while Little Gus himself spent many happy hours in filling a penny copy-book with his imposing signature.

“I dunno what to make of grammar,” he said, for the third time. “I dunno why they invented it.”

Phosie, also for the third time, told him to close the book and not to worry any more that day. She had gone back to her work. Gus still sat on the edge of his chair, fingering the Primer.

“But a feller has got to learn,” he said. “A feller ought to know, fundamentally, all this sort o’ thing, Phosie.”

“You’re quite right, Gus,” agreed Phosie, absently, admiring a dainty Italian patch-box in rock crystal which lay in her palm.

“Then why can’t I manage it? What’s the matter with me?” said Gus.

Phosie, restoring the patch-box to its nook and taking out a bloodstone scent-bottle, mounted in gold, only shook her head, smiling at him. She had rarely seen him so serious.

“I want to learn! I want to be more like you!” he blurted out. “I know he thinks I’m only a fool—”

“Do you mean Mr Revell?” she interrupted.

“Yes. But I’m not a fool. I want to learn. I try hard, but it’s no use. I can’t get the hang of things. I don’t understand half what people say, but I suppose I’m all right—ain’t I?—fundamentally?”

Little Gus clung to his word, and once more repeated it, taking a step towards Phosie, with his hands stretched out.

She turned her back to the case and looked at him in surprise.

The light from a window fell on his face. It gave her a shock, for she suddenly realised that Little Gus was growing up. He was trying to understand his own deficiencies, and she saw the pain and doubt of his groping mind struggling for expression.

"Dear!" she said affectionately. "Of course you are all right, but you must be patient. You can't learn easily, and the books—"

"Oh, I don't mean book learning!" he interrupted. "I mean—I mean I want to be clever, Phosie. I want to be like other fellers. I'm no good to nobody. They wouldn't care if I was dead!"

"I should care!" cried Phosie. "Don't you talk such nonsense."

She put her hands on his shoulders and gave him a little shake. Then she tilted up his chin with one finger and laughed at him.

That was the best way to treat Little Gus. Phosie's intuition served her in better stead than other people's reason. To argue with him and endeavour to sharpen his wits by discussion, or to encourage introspection, would have only deepened his trouble. She had helped him in childhood by her courage and decision; she helped him now by her praise and approbation. He was not born to buffet with the strong winds and rough seas of life. He was only happy in soft sunshine and pleasant breezes.

The straining look in his face died away. His moment of bitterness was forgotten.

He gaily offered to help her dust the scent-bottles and powder-boxes. The mere suggestion would have made Mr Revell shudder. Phosie only smiled, bending over

a blue Persian perfume sprinkler. She tactfully rejected his help, and Gus returned to the attack on his English grammar.

Phosie finished her work with great satisfaction to herself. There was only one thing in the house that she liked better than the case of scent-bottles, and that was a drawer in Mr Revell's desk which contained a box of quaint old rings. It was kept locked, but he trusted her with the key.

They were valuable posy rings, singularly attractive to Phosie. She was never tired of slipping them on to her fingers, although they were nearly all too big for her, and reading the fond, quaint inscriptions—

“ Accept this gift of honest love
That never could nor can remove.”

“ My promise past
Shall always last.”

“ In constancie
I live and die.”

Her favourite was made of little gold hearts, set with turquoise, and engraved “ You have me hart.” It happened to fit the third finger of her left hand. A heavy Russian ring of chased silver looked very handsome on her thumb, and the greatest treasure of all, a dull gold duplex hoop faintly engraved with palm leaves, she always placed on the first finger.

The rings set with precious stones were kept in a box at the back of the drawer. Phosie was also entrusted with the key of this box. There was only one diamond, but exactly a dozen other gems of equal beauty, if lesser value—a too pale ruby, a moss agate, a soft beryl, a fiery opal, a deep garnet, a cloudy moonstone, a gleaming cat's-eye, a sapphire that mirrored a star, a gorgeous topaz, a mysterious chalcedony, a severe onyx, and a beamy pearl.

“ I love them all! ” said Euphrosyne to Mr Revell.

" You can play with them whenever you like," he answered.

His absolute trust in her care of his treasures was the greatest proof he ever gave, year after year, that the loving girl had won a place in his heart.

CHAPTER IX

JULES

ONE afternoon, in early autumn, Euphrosyne and Little Gus were walking together over Barnes Common.

The sun was hanging, a red ball, low in the sky. Every tree and bush, even the dried brown grass, was touched with red-gold light. A robin perched on the bare boughs of a hawthorn; a flock of crows swept across the sky; the ever-busy sparrows hopped and chirruped on path and sward.

There was a cold wind whipping the dead leaves over the ground and shaking the branches of the trees. Two or three little parties of children hunted vainly for blackberries among the bushes. The main roads over the Common were busy with carts and motors. A few scattered cyclists, stooping to conquer, rode gallantly against the wind in one direction, or airily coasted in the other.

Phosie was telling Little Gus the story of one of Fenimore Cooper's novels, chapter by chapter, and wholly absorbed in the plot. She imagined herself on the prairies, and saw nothing of the endless rows of London houses which surround the little patch of open land, anxiously and covetously mounting guard over it.

Gus listened like a child, taking every strange incident for granted, very rarely moved to surprise and never wearied. He had listened in this way, at second hand, to nearly all of Scott's novels and much of Dumas, Dickens and Thackeray, but Phosie pleased him best with

detective stories of secret murders and unusual crimes, for he was morbidly curious to hear of horrors, but only moved to incredulity, not unmixed with contempt, by fanciful or weird tales.

It was dark when they reached The Stroll. Phosie, ending her story as sharply as if she had literally closed the book with a bang, ran up the steps and rapped smartly at the door. Being past the hour of Mr Revell's return she knew he would expect to find her at home.

"Oh, I'm so sorry—" she began as the door opened, and then stopped. It was not Mrs Bird who stood before her, or Mr Revell, but a strange man. A look of intense amazement came into her face.

"'Ullo!" she heard Little Gus say, feebly, behind her.

"Of course you are surprised—I must apologise—Miss Moore, I think?" said the stranger, and he put out his hand, smiling broadly at her blank expression.

"Yes," said Phosie. "Who are you?"

The stranger laughed outright at the blunt question.

He was a young man, short, thick-set, clean-shaven, with noticeably white teeth and big, clear, brown eyes.

"I am Mr Revell's nephew, just arrived from the other side of the world," he replied, opening the door wider for Phosie and her companion to enter. "My uncle has been telling me about you both. I am very pleased to meet you."

Again he extended his hand, first to the girl and then to Gus. Phosie, who was very quick in the sense of touch, found it was warm and soft through her glove. It felt like a woman's hand.

He stood on one side to let her pass, and, when she was in the hall, closed the door.

She was instantly conscious of a sense of oppression. He seemed to have shut out the vital air. An indescribable feeling of weakness swept over her; it was not physical weakness, but a darkening of the spirit, alien to her nature and never experienced before.

Phosie was astonished at herself. What was the matter? She looked helplessly at Little Gus, stumbling against the furniture in the semi-darkness, and then she looked again at the stranger.

He smiled in a most friendly, kind manner. The cloud lightened—lifted—was gone.

"Is that Euphrosyne?" said Mr Revell's voice from the breakfast-room.

She ran downstairs. Her old friend blinked at her nervously and she saw that he was agitated.

"A great surprise, my dear!" he said. "This is my brother's son—poor Jules's son—you have heard me speak of my brother Jules?"

"Yes, Mr Revell."

"Dear me! Dear me! It only seems yesterday that he went away. Poor little Ju!" he continued, polishing his spectacles over and over again. "I can hardly realise that he is a married man with a grown-up boy! He has sent me this letter, Phosie; read it, my dear. Sit down, Jules, sit down!"

The young man, who had stood by the door all this time, looking at his uncle, now turned his eyes on the girl.

He had arrived early in the afternoon, several hours before Mr Revell's return from the Museum, and heard her story, with characteristic exaggerations, from Mrs Bird. It had made him curious to see her. He had never heard of anything so ridiculous, or so delightful, as his uncle's goodness.

Phosie sat down at the table, intent on the letter from Mr Revell's brother. Her face was partly shaded by the brim of her hat, but the light of the lamp fell on her mouth and chin, and Jules Revell saw that her skin was white and clear, while her lips showed the exquisite colouring that no word can exactly describe—red is too harsh, pink is too feeble—colouring that suggests the bloom of a flower petal.

She bent close to the lamp. He could see the pretty nose—the thought passed through his mind how rarely

one sees a pretty nose—and the small, well-shaped ear. Her eyes were still in shadow. He could see where her light brown hair curled into little rings, little broken hoops, soft and caressing, little sunny waves breaking away from the darker coil on the nape of her neck.

She found it hard to believe that this letter, effusive and intimate, could have been written by a brother of Henry Revell. It was to introduce his boy, "Jules Junior" as he called him, and he actually addressed the dried-up art collector as "Dearest Harry" and "Good old Hal."

Having finished the affectionate scrawl, Phosie passed it back to Mr Revell and turned to the visitor.

"I'm sure all your people will be very pleased to see you!" she exclaimed.

Jules laughed. He was not at all sure of it himself. His uncle's greeting had been far from demonstrative.

"I hope to make myself agreeable," he said, "I am not an aggressive Canadian, Miss Moore. I really believe you would take me for an Englishman. You won't find me the typical Colonial cousin out of a novel. I never 'calculate' or 'guess.' I am not a young millionaire, but at the same time I have plenty of money for my trip. I haven't come, like a prodigal, to waste my uncle's substance or abuse his hospitality."

Phosie wondered how many times he had used the personal pronoun in a single sentence.

"Where are you stopping, Jules?" asked Mr Revell, anxiously. "We are really so crowded in this house that I'm afraid—"

"Now, say, uncle!" interrupted the young man, with the Canadian inflexion in his voice he had just disavowed, "don't you worry about that. I've got a room at Scott's Hotel, 'way over there in Bloomsbury. It's a pleasant part of the town, I am told. You'll only see me now and then."

"I shall always be delighted, Jules," began Mr Revell, but his nephew again interrupted him.

"You're very kind, but I'm sure you lead a busy life. My dad knows all about that."

He did not repeat his father's actual words—"Your Uncle Henry is always burrowing into the earth, more like a mole than a man, after dead men's treasures."

Phosie said nothing. She saw that the visitor had disturbed her guardian's usual serenity, and wondered whether he would be invited to dinner.

There was a somewhat embarrassing silence. Mr Revell fidgeted with the books on the table. Jules glanced round the room. It gave him an inspiration.

"Is it true, uncle," he said suddenly, "that you have a collection of—of—curios? I'm intensely interested in anything antique."

Mr Revell's face brightened.

"How unlike your dear father!" he exclaimed. "I must show you my collection of English pottery. I have a collection also of old silver, but it isn't safe to keep it in a house like this. Moth and rust have no chance of corrupting my treasures since I got Euphrosyne to take care of them, but thieves might break in and steal. I'll take you over the house when we've had our dinner."

Phosie felt relieved. The guest was not to be sent away without a meal. She hurried out of the room to advise and help Mrs Bird in the preparations.

She was greatly interested in Jules Revell, having quite forgotten that strange minute of oppression when first they met. The freemasonry of youth had already set them apart from Mr Revell. She felt he was her equal, not to be studied like the old man, not to be humoured like Little Gus.

For the first time for three years she looked forward eagerly to the evening hours. There would be no chess—never was a game more unsuited to Euphrosyne's temperament—and no dictation. But quickly on the heels of

these thoughts came a pang of self-reproach. What greater pleasure could she know than serving her dear, dear guardian?

"You love playing at chess, and you love reading out loud, of course you do!" she said severely to her own reflection in the little looking-glass on her chest of drawers, but the reflection only laughed at her.

What a captivating reflection it was! But Phosie did not admire it half so much as most girls admire the wonderful beings they are so fond of studying in the glass. She would rather have resembled her friend, Lily Parlow, with her flaxen ringlets and face like an expensive wax doll.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly. Jules Revell, who treated his uncle with affectionate intimacy, told a great many stories about himself, gave them his opinion of London with such ingenuous frankness that even Mr Revell forgave his ignorance, and rarely turned those liquid, big brown eyes of his away from Phosie's face.

She saw how he stared at her, but while many girls would have been embarrassed, or even annoyed, she was only moved to curiosity.

Why did he look at her like that? She had never seen such an expression in a man's face. It puzzled her. It checked her gaiety. It was so intense, so brilliant, it asked her a perpetual question she could not understand.

After dinner, to his uncle's great satisfaction, Jules at once reminded Mr Revell of his promise to show him the collection.

Phosie ran upstairs first to light the gas, glad to get away for a minute.

She threw open a staircase window and leaned out. She was flushed and a little excited. The wind on her face was as refreshing as a dash of cold water.

Mr Revell lingered behind to speak to Mrs Bird. He wanted to thank her, in his courteous, old-fashioned way, for her special efforts with dinner.

Jules, slipping out of the room behind him, followed the girl.

He knew he was behaving like a fool. He knew he was taking risks. She did not hear his quick step on the stairs, but suddenly found him leaning out of the window beside her, and suddenly felt his arm round her neck.

"It's a fine night, isn't it? Are you looking at the stars?" she heard his voice whisper at the same instant.

Phosie put up her hand and caught his fingers, throwing him off, not with violence, but with the decision of instinct.

He took a step back. They looked at each other blankly.

The colour slowly crept into his face.

For an instant he looked mean, and cringing, and afraid—but only for an instant—then he had seized upon her hand, raised it to his lips, and begged her pardon. Almost before she had caught the meaning of the words he was speaking gaily to Mr Revell as he came upstairs.

Phosie drew her hand through her guardian's arm and pressed close to him.

He smiled down at her absently and kindly, laying his other hand on Jules's shoulder, as they looked at his precious pottery.

CHAPTER X

THE PURSUIT OF MIRTH

MISS SAPIO was at home, very much at home, in her little house in Regent's Park.

Her drawing-room was heavy with the mingled odours of coffee, tobacco, scent and flowers. A log fire burned on the blue-tiled hearth, although it was a fairly warm day in mid-September. Miss Sapio's liver-and-white spaniel, getting very, very old, was curled into a quivering, sleek ball in front, with his eyes fixed on the genial glow.

Miss Sapio herself reclined in a low chair, a cigarette between her fingers, with her tawny hair gathered into a great knot at the back of her head, adorned with a turquoise comb.

Her big, but still beautiful figure was shown to advantage in a clinging dress of flame-coloured silk, a very extravagant dress, slightly soiled, just as her showy tea-gowns used to be in the old days in Airy Street. There were several bead necklaces round her neck, gold bangles on both arms, and her fingers were covered with rings.

She was the only woman in the room, but there were five men, all sitting very close together, as the space was so limited, and all accustomed, for Miss Sapio's visitors usually stayed a long time, to the bad air.

Miss Sapio was making a success of her life; she was rich; she was popular; she was acting the leading part in a play which was only in the fourth week of a run which was to prove a record at a West End theatre.

The fortunate author of this play was among her guests.

He was a quiet, thin young man with shrewd, small features, and a high, bumpy forehead which gave his face a peculiar look of disproportion, as if the top of his head ought to have belonged to somebody else.

Miss Sapio had once said to him, when a slight disagreement about a scene in his play had degenerated into a quarrel, that there was only one head in England more ridiculous than his, and that was Beachy Head. Their quarrels, however, were of the past. They now called each other "Dear," and had become the most sincere friends, for Miss Sapio was capable of true, disinterested friendship, and a singularly keen, discriminating brain was at work behind the playwright's ugly brows.

Yet another of her guests was a fellow-worker of the hostess's. This was a popular actor of boys' parts—stage boys of any age between seventeen and twenty-seven—who looked like a mere youth, being very slight and delicate in build, with well-cut, uninteresting features, and a high, musical voice. As a matter of fact he had to look behind him to catch a glimpse of the thirties, and was a married man with sons who were as big, and nearly as old in appearance, as himself.

Sitting next to the actor was a middle-aged artist, who was making his first call, and was too obviously interested and amused in his surroundings to trouble to talk; nor was he the only silent member of the party, for a much younger man was lying at full length, half asleep, on a sofa which reached from the heavily-curtained little window at one end of the room to the heavily-curtained little door at the other.

Miss Sapio did not resent the lazy familiarity of his pose and manner. He happened to be a very handsome young man, and she admired him whatever he did, or left undone.

The discordant note in the harmony of the afternoon was occasionally struck by an old, retired professional friend of the hostess, who was also drowsy in the heat of

the room. His stage name was Quizzical Quilter, and he had been particularly successful in the almost extinct branch of dramatic art which was graced by the great Grimaldi.

She tolerated him for the sake of old times, although she had confided to the experienced ears of the actor and the playwright, when he made his appearance, her fear that "Quizzy was a little bit 'on.'" Fortunately he was not a great talker, and his occasional remarks were very cheery, if not appropriate to the conversation.

"The pursuit of mirth! I don't quite know what you mean by pursuing mirth," said the playwright, repeating a phrase used by the actor. "Mustn't one pursue the cause of mirth, for the thing itself is only an effect?"

"I wish you didn't analyse everything I say, Hughie," answered his friend. "I only wanted to point out that mirth, or happiness, or delight, whatever you call it, was far more worth pursuing than wealth, or fame, or even power."

"It's more intangible," said the playwright. "And more easily lost."

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Miss Sapio, bending forward to flick the ash off her cigarette on to the hearth. "It's just as easy to hang on to jollity and pleasure as to anything else. Where should I be, I should like to know, if I always moped?"

"What's that got to do with it, Florence?" asked the playwright, patiently.

"If my brother Jack were here," continued Miss Sapio, ignoring the question, "he'd make you boys understand the meaning of mirth. When a man's been living in the West Indies, and had yellow fever scores of times, he appreciates the mirth of London. He doesn't talk about being merry—he is merry."

"You're getting more and more inconsequent and emphatic every day, dear," observed the playwright, who was weary at times of his friend's brother Jack.

Miss Sapio had raised her voice, which aroused the old clown in the corner.

"Quite right, Flo! God bless my soul, yes! Give it 'em, Flo!" he exclaimed, and slept again.

The other men laughed, and the artist put in a word.

"I have been pursuing mirth all my life, but the chase is only amusing when one is unconscious of it. Don't you think so, Walter?"

He turned to the young man on the lounge, who started and pulled himself into a sitting posture, stretching out his long legs across the hearth.

"I beg your pardon!" he said in a yawn. "I'm afraid I've been asleep, but that's no reflection on your interesting conversation. I went to bed so very early yesterday."

"That's a strange reason for being sleepy to-day," said the artist.

"I think you misunderstand me," rejoined the other. "When I said I went to bed so very early yesterday, I really meant at about three o'clock this morning. But you always talk about going to bed yesterday when once you are up, don't you? But that is not my only excuse for being sleepy. I'm generally sleepy."

"You're like the Fat Boy, Walter, but you're not fat," said the playwright.

"Exactly. Why, I remember sleeping all through *The Belle of New York* some years ago, and I was sitting near to the big drum too. You know how frightfully noisy these American pieces are."

"Even more noisy than our interesting conversation," remarked his friend.

"What were you talking about?" asked the other, stirring up the spaniel with his foot.

"The pursuit of mirth!" replied the actor. He liked his phrase.

"Mirth!" repeated the lazy young man, with his shoulders drooping and his hands clasped between his

knees. "Do you know, I think that is one of the prettiest words. It always expresses to me something so much more delicate than gaiety, and so much more refined than pleasure, but it's so evanescent. That's the devil of it. It's like everything else worth having—it doesn't last."

"Good heavens! Mirth means laughter, and who wants to laugh for months at a stretch?" asked the playwright.

"Three hours is enough, isn't it, Hughie?" said Walter Race, smiling at the man of success.

He stood erect, stretching his arms over his head. Miss Sapio put up her hands.

"Give me a pull up, Wally, there's a dear boy!" she said.

Instead of taking her hands he stooped and playfully lifted her on to her feet.

"I say, Flo, you're a woman of weight in the land!" he said, impudently, his arms still round her waist.

Miss Sapio laughed, her face on a level with his, bending forward. He looked at her coolly, no longer impudently, and there was no response to her challenging smile in his moody eyes. She put up a finger and drew it down one side of his face.

"I wish you hadn't lost the mark of the chin-strap, Wally!" she said.

"Thank God, I have!" he exclaimed, thrusting his hands into his pockets. "I want to forget all that muddle in South Africa. It isn't a cheerful recollection. You know, my dear girl, it's over a year since I got home. The mark of the chin-strap was always your imagination. You're thinking of last summer, when I got tanned on the river."

"Oh, Wally! Wally! If I were only eighteen I'd marry you!" exclaimed Miss Sapio.

"Well, if you don't mind about the added seven years, I'm sure I don't!" said Walter.

“That makes me twenty-five!” cried Miss Sapio, and she gave him a blow in the chest. “You flatterer!”

“When are you going to have me to dinner?” he asked, laughing.

“Any day you like to come, Wally. Why not stop now?” said Miss Sapio.

He puckered his brows.

“So sorry, but I have an engagement to-night, Flo, to meet one of my aunts and half a dozen cousins and take them to a concert.”

“Poor old boy!” she exclaimed. “To-morrow?”

“If I possibly can! I’ll send you a wire in the morning.”

He shook hands very cordially with the other men, including the old comedian in the corner, who wrung his hand with as much affection as if Walter had been a long-lost son.

“God bless you, my dear boy!” he said. “Now, take care of yourself for your poor old mother’s sake.”

A mental vision of his mother—a particularly frigid, hook-nosed lady in a Valenciennes lace cap—presented itself to Walter’s mind. He laughed about it as he went downstairs, accompanied by the artist. They groped their way through the dark, narrow hall, filled with vapours from the kitchen, where Miss Sapio’s early dinner was in preparation, and so out into the street.

Walter gave a great sigh of relief as he banged the door behind them.

“Thank God!” he said. “I feel as if I’d been cooked along with Flo’s roast mutton.”

“Which way are you going?” asked his friend.

Walter looked up and down the street, and shrugged his shoulders.

“Your way—I don’t care—suppose we cut across the Park to York Gate? We shall get a little pure air into our lungs.

"Right!" agreed the artist. "What time do you have to meet your aunt and cousins?"

Walter was puzzled for a second.

"Meet my aunt and cousins?" he repeated; then, with a flash of remembrance and a laugh—"Oh, that was a lie. I didn't want to stop any longer. I'd had enough of Miss Sapio and that nice, inebriated old gentleman."

The artist, who was a big, burly man, slow of speech, gave him a thoughtful, curious side glance.

There was a certain fine severity in Walter Race's face seen in profile. It was a compact, clearly-cut profile, no indecision about it; the eye was wide, the modelling of the jaw delicate, but not without power, the lines of the mouth somewhat hard, the lips being too closely pressed together. It was only when he looked one full in the face and smiled that Walter gave any impression of gentleness, or even warmth of disposition.

His usual expression was not attractive; it was bored, dissatisfied, lacking the quick, responsive charm of youth and high spirits. He was physically fit, after the manner of his class and age, but his fine health and perfect muscular development seemed to be more the result of accident—the mere inheritance of the carefully-nurtured, well-schooled and well-fed from generation to generation—than the outcome of individual effort.

For all his height, his handsome features, his good bearing, there was only the empty sheath of a man—latent possibilities, untouched depths, wasted force.

"I can't understand you, Walter," said the artist. "Why on earth do you go so often to see Miss Sapio? Why do you flirt with her? You don't care a brass farthing about the woman."

No, not a brass farthing!" said Race. "But I've got into the habit of lounging round to her place, for I like Hughie and he's usually there. Besides, you must confess that Flo is a good fellow. Most women are so absurdly exacting."

"How lazy you are!" exclaimed the artist.

"Of course I am. Why shouldn't I be?" asked the other. "What is the use of energy unless you've got your living to earn? You see you're more lucky than I am, Wainwright. You're obliged to bustle about and get your little pictures sold, or the poor little Wainwrights would starve and haunt your dreams like the children of Macduff."

"You don't even go in for sport," said his friend.

"I didn't mind ski-ing in Norway last year," said Race. "And I shouldn't object to motoring, if I could afford a good car, but I've never enjoyed shooting or fishing, though I'm not half a bad shot. There's something sickening about sport. My brothers think I'm an awful ass."

"What a pity you've got so much money," said his friend.

"Now, there I don't agree with you," said Walter, looking at Wainwright with a pleasant smile. "I have just the wrong amount, enough to keep me in idleness, but not enough to satisfy my desires. I am in no better position than I was before my father died. I don't spend any more or any less, and I've lost the stimulus of probable disinheritance."

"You were just as lazy in the old days," said Wainwright, with a laugh. "You were not the oldest son, were you?"

"Oh, no, John is the oldest. I don't think you know my brother John? He is one of the funniest men I've ever seen—unconsciously funny, of course—but they take him very seriously down at our place in Suffolk. He was always fond of playing games, if only all the rest of us would do as we were told, and if we didn't he twisted our arms or thrashed us. Since then he has 'enlarged his sphere of influence'—that's one of John's favourite phrases—which means that he plays at being Lord of

the Manor and Justice of the Peace, administering arm-twistings and thrashings on a larger scale."

"You're very severe," observed Wainwright.

"Then there's Leo," continued Race; "I'm afraid I don't like Leo. He's a difficult brute, but since we got him married to an heiress, a little dove of a girl of nineteen, I must confess that he's run pretty straight—for him. Edmund is next to me. Dear old Teddy! He was always considered the fool of the family, so my mother came to the conclusion that he was 'destined for the Church'—John inherits his pompous phrases from my mother—but unfortunately he never managed to pass an exam. Other people would have given it up, but my mother is a clever woman, and luckily the bishop of our diocese is one of her oldest friends. One can never quite explain how these little things are managed, but the fact remains that Edmund has been a pillar of the Church for several years. There's a back door to every edifice, you know."

"Then you are the youngest brother?" said Wainwright.

"No! Crowds of us, aren't there? I come after Edmund, and Frank is the youngest. He is our black sheep. Having made himself the hero of a village scandal before he was twenty, Frank was packed off to the other side of the world, not so much as a punishment, but because he expressed a ridiculous desire to undo the mischief he had done. There was good stuff in Frank. I haven't seen him for four years, but I know he'll turn up some day. An edifying list of brothers, isn't it? But you must remember the strong point in our favour—we're of such good family!"

He laughed. Wainwright was silent for a few minutes, then he suddenly laid his hand on Race's arm.

"I wish I could make you see the world with different eyes, Walter!" he said. "Your outlook is so bitter and one-sided. I'm not speaking as regards your brothers,"

he went on quickly, as Race was about to interrupt, "but of your whole life. How long have I known you—three years?—and I've never seen you really happy, except for the few weeks before you went out to the South African war. Can't you find something to do? Travel—study—go in for politics—reforms—Good God! There's enough work to be done in the world. Why don't you take up a profession? Why don't you get married? Wake up, Walter! You're sick of living on pleasure. No man should only spend while others only toil."

Wainwright's face flushed and his strong fingers gripped on his friend's arm, but the smile with which Walter turned on him, the amused, light contempt in his handsome face, made him suddenly ridiculous in his own eyes. The young man's expression belittled his friend's earnestness, and made him ashamed of the affectionate outburst.

"Here endeth the first lesson!" said Race. "But you misjudge me, Wainwright, for I am not at all sick of living on pleasure. I pursue it all the time—the pursuit of mirth, as Hughie said this afternoon. Something to live for and nothing to do! That's the ideal state of existence for rotters like myself, without any particular training or shining talents. I have nothing to do," he went on, with a change from bitterness to cheerful indifference, "and I hope some day to get something to live for. Then, my dear Wainwright, I shall be more worthy of your friendship."

They turned out of the Park into the main road, leaving the September beauty of burnished leaves and autumn flowers for the dust and traffic of the streets. Race once more gave a sigh of relief. He did not trouble to suppress the recurrent thought that dear old Wainwright was rather boring.

"I think I'll take a hansom, old man," he said. "I'm rather in a hurry to get home."

"Are you afraid your aunt and cousins will be growing impatient, Walter?" said Wainwright, smiling.

“No, no, really I have an appointment!” protested Race, lifting his finger to a cabman on the lookout for a fare. “Good-bye, old man! My love to Mrs Wainwright and the kiddies. Look me up soon, won’t you?”

When he was alone in the cab Walter Race folded his arms on the doors—it was his usual position in a hansom—while his eyes wandered listlessly over the perpetually forming and perpetually broken puzzle of the busy streets. He had no appointment, as his friend had suspected, and he was debating in his mind whether he would dine at his club or at one of the many houses where he had standing invitations.

He was depressed, partly because it was his habit to be depressed, and partly at the anticipation of a long-delayed visit to his oldest brother, for which he was to leave town in a couple of days.

Race was essentially a London man, but the beginning and end of his London was the West End. The pleasures of the city alone appealed to him; he cared little for the struggle and stress of its daily labour, and, although he was naturally generous, his heart had long been hardened to the sight of poverty.

It is wonderful how the occasional giving of a small silver coin to a beggar will salve the conscience of the man with full pockets.

As the cab crossed Oxford Street on its way to Piccadilly—Walter Race’s chambers were in Plantagenet Court, Savoy—there was a sudden block in the traffic. His driver pulled up sharply close to the curb.

Walter, who was observant with all his laziness, looked at a little group of people who were as suddenly checked as he himself in their aimless, or perhaps necessary, hurry.

A girl had stepped back on to the pavement from the road, the wheel of his cab brushing her skirts. She laughed at the narrow shave. Walter heard the laugh—

not loud, but clear, gurgling, unaffected, prolonged—as expressive as a happy phrase of mirthful music.

He bent forward, his arms still folded on the doors, to look at her. Their eyes met. She was standing between two men, one of whom, a tall, elderly gentleman in gold spectacles, clutched nervously at her arm, while the other, a swarthy, thick-set fellow, who showed a gleam of white teeth between full smiling lips, apparently shared her childish amusement.

The girl looked at Walter, eyes on eyes, and saw that he too shared her mirth. There was the instant response in his quick movement towards her and the change in his expression.

The colour leapt like a flame into her cheeks. She tried, tried with all her might, to be serious. In vain. The rebellious lips, the sparkling eyes were beyond her control. For that one long second she was brilliant, wonderful, quickening his dull pulse with her flash of recognition and innocent delight at his admiration.

It was too exquisite, too absurd to last! He was glad when the hansom jerked forward and left her behind, feeling she would have disappointed him at a second glance; but the lilt of her laughter echoed in his brain. He could not forget it. It made him laugh too—all by himself—in his rooms that night.

That was how they met and parted, for the first time Walter Race and Euphrosyne.

CHAPTER XI

HOW JULES BURNT THE PHOTOGRAPHS

JULES REVELL had long since made his peace with Euphrosyne. She forgave him readily enough, for no feeling of personal anger ever stayed in her mind, and when she found that he kept his promise by never repeating the indiscretion of the first night of his arrival she dismissed the incident from her mind.

Jules was no fool and possessed the quality, rare in a man of his type, of patience. He was self-controlled up to a certain point, but when that point was reached—to give the devil his due it did not often happen—he was emotional and violent, easily turned to good or evil—unnerved, another man.

He had unbounded belief in the ultimate attainment of any desire on which he really set his heart, and the manner of his self-blame, at occasional failure, only added to his colossal conceit.

“If I had worked harder or been more cunning I should have won!” he always said to himself. “When I exert the whole strength of my will it is irresistible.”

His uncle liked him, for there was a touch of sincerity, if only a touch, in his enthusiasm over the subjects that solely interested Mr Revell, and it enabled him to play the part of modern ignorance, taking first lessons in antique learning, very convincingly.

Mrs Bird liked him, for if his jokes and stories lacked quality they had quantity to recommend them, and Jules made it a rule to be agreeable to every woman he came across.

His secret attitude towards women, although he would never have confessed it, was one of contemptuous pity, mingled with never-satisfied curiosity.

Euphrosyne liked him, although she found, as at their first meeting, something oppressive in his strength and capability.

He was reticent about his home life, but apparently devoted to his Canadian mother, to whom he wrote every week, and inclined to disparage, when Mr Revell was not present, the English tastes and traits of his father. Jules judged all men by their physical strength, and his father was something of a weakling.

He was kind to Little Gus, who was too young and feeble in muscles to be worth considering as a man at all. Besides, he understood Phosie's affection for the boy, and never mistook it for more than friendship. He was troubled by no fine shades of jealousy. It was Phosie's love he was beginning to crave—love like his own, passionate and absorbing—not to share in her thoughts and fancies. Of course he admitted that they added to her charm, but her prettiness would have been none the less if she had been a stupid, unimaginative girl, Jules argued, and it was her beauty alone which attracted him.

He was a great talker, and quite unwittingly his new friends, Mr Revell, Phosie and Gus, spoilt him. The society of men of his own age, more especially of his own fighting weight, would have held his boastfulness in check.

Many of the stories of his own business successes were true. He was not reticent on his business affairs. At fifteen he had made up his mind not to go to school any longer, laughing at his father's arguments in favour of a college education, although he knew that the idea of his son graduating from one of the Canadian or American universities, Oxford or Cambridge being beyond his means, was a long-cherished dream of the exiled Englishman.

Jules's first employment had been in a store, but he soon

quarrelled with his master, owing to the latter's not unnatural objection to pertinent and impertinent criticism of his business methods. Then he worked in a soap factory for a few months, followed by a long period "on the road," as a commercial traveller, when he had the doubtful reputation of being known as "the coolest liar who ever slung dry goods."

His next venture was in partnership with a sharp American, with whom he drifted into the States, exploiting worthless articles in the shape of toilet accessories and patent medicines. This was a period of his career of which Jules rarely spoke, although, when the partnership was dissolved, he returned to his native town a fairly rich man. He was still under thirty, which perhaps accounts for the fact that he became stage-struck and toured an entertainment company of his own triumphantly through Ontario and the Lower Provinces of Canada.

It was with the profits from this tour, and what was left of his partnership money, that he was able to go to Europe for a holiday.

Phosie was greatly interested in the adventures of his little company. It was the only part of his life that really interested her, for she never forgot that her dear father had spent his boyhood in travelling companies.

Jules was easily persuaded to give her real and imaginary details.

One day, a couple of months after his first appearance at the quiet house in The Stroll, he found Euphrosyne alone. Mr Revell was at the Museum, and Little Gus had accompanied Mrs Bird to the ancestral halls of the Bird family in Peckham.

"Taking care of the house?" he asked, hanging up his soft felt hat and overcoat.

Then he turned and faced her, with his hands on his hips, his tremendous chest extended to its full breadth, and his fresh-coloured face glowing.

"A new suit, Phosie!" he said. "What do you think of it? All right, eh?"

It was soft, rough grey serge, loose, but so well cut that it seemed to add to his height while lessening the thickness of his too heavily built frame. Phosie laid her first fingers lightly on his shoulders, and he let her twist him round.

"Millionairish!" she exclaimed. "It suits us to perfection. We always think ourselves very good-looking, but now we are simply irresistible!"

"No bluff, Phosie!" he protested, laughing. "Do you like it, straight? Does the shade suit me?"

"Do you mean your complexion?" asked Phosie, pretending to be very serious.

"Of course not! What does a man want with a complexion? Does it suit me as a whole? It doesn't make me look narrow-chested, does it?"

"That question is a little too transparent, my dear Jules!" she said. "I'm not going to pay you any compliments on your 'chest expansion,' or whatever you call it. When you puff yourself out like that you only look like a huge robin redbreast."

"Is that all you've got to say about it?" asked Jules.

"About the new suit? At present that's all. After I've recovered from the first dazzling effect I may be able to go into details," said Phosie.

"Well, I'm glad you like it," and he turned again to the hat-rack to take a packet of photographs out of his overcoat pocket. "Where are you sitting?"

"Downstairs. We never have a fire in the other rooms, you know."

She led the way into the darkness of the basement, and, kneeling down in front of the breakfast-room fire, stirred it into a blaze. Jules threw himself into Mr Revell's arm-chair, watching her. She stooped to look under the bars, her braid of thick hair falling over one shoulder and her face flushed in the heat.

"How old are you, Phosie?" asked the young man, suddenly.

"The first bloom of youth is over! I shall never see seventeen again!" she answered, with a dramatic flourish of the tongs. Then she went on putting little tempting pieces of coal where the flames would catch them.

"What a shame it is!" said Jules, after a pause.

Phosie sat back on her heels, tongs in hand.

"What's a shame, Jules?"

"That you should be kept in prison."

"Whatever do you mean?"

He didn't answer for a minute, but took up an open book Phosie had been reading, glanced down the page curiously, looked at the title, and then threw it roughly on to the table.

"*Macaulay's Essays!*" he exclaimed contemptuously. "My word! What a shame! If my uncle enjoys being a fossil himself I don't see why he should try to fossilize a girl of eighteen. I think you live an awful life, Phosie, no pleasures, no friends, no change. You don't know what it is to be alive. You're treated like a child. Why, there are dozens of girls at your age who have already—"

He stopped abruptly and changed the sentence.

"You can't be content. It's impossible. I know my uncle's awfully good and all that sort of thing, but his time is over. He's forgotten his youth. He's like a dried old stick, with no sap in it. But you and I are both young. Everything is before us—everything worth having."

He bent forward eagerly, and Phosie still sat on her heels, smiling, and playing with the tongs. Her expression of amused interest at first excited, and then exasperated, her companion.

"What's the good of books and old crockery when you're eighteen?" he went on. "What's the good of living in a museum? The kind of life you lead is for old

men and worn-out women. Don't you realise that nothing matters—nothing really interests us in the world—but our personal joys and experiences? Reading's no good—talking's no good—it's life, it's action, it's love that matters."

He seized her hand and made an effort to draw her towards him, but Phosie instantly pulled herself away and rose to her feet.

"I will not let you hold my hand! I hate it. I hate to be touched! Will you ever understand that?" she said firmly and emphatically, with no air of offended dignity, but with unmistakable determination.

"Why are you so cruel and so absurd?" asked Jules, but he did not attempt to disobey her.

Her momentary seriousness was gone. She hung up the tongs on their little nail and sat down at the table.

"Now, Jules, you've been talking nonsense," she said, "and I don't want to hear any more of it. Where are the photographs you promised to show me?"

"I never met a girl like you!" he exclaimed. "You look so soft and gentle, but you're really a bit of flint. You hurt me a dozen times a week, and I—and I—"

He sprang up, and, throwing himself down beside her, tried to capture her hand again, saying all sorts of incoherent, passionate words. Not wholly sincere, or wholly playing a part, he knew the effect of mingled violence and tenderness on most women, and expected anything rather than what occurred.

If Phosie had been angry, or frightened, or even thrown herself recklessly into his arms, he would not have been so much surprised. But she suddenly laid both hands on his shoulders and gave him a smart, strong push. He was on one knee and the attack was unexpected. He swayed for a second, caught at the table to regain his balance, failed in the attempt, and rolled over sideways on to the floor.

It was not at all dignified and Phosie jumped up with a

shriek of laughter. Jules had bumped his head against the leg of the table. It was irritating and painful, and he looked, as he felt, very ridiculous. He picked himself up with a poor attempt to join in her amusement.

"If you were a boy, you imp—!" he said threateningly. "As it is, I've got half a mind to punish you."

"Come now, show me the photographs!" said Phosie, with a stamp of her foot. "You'll never please me by making yourself so stupid. I'm not at all impressed when you talk about your heart and adoration. I don't believe a word you say. I don't like you when you rave, and I'm not in the least afraid of you."

Jules did not answer. Her light indifference baffled him, but an ugly expression passed over his face. He shrugged his heavy shoulders and picked up the packet of photographs. There was something of the surly dog in his disposition, and Phosie's coolness was the whip he feared.

The photographs of his company were neatly encased in long strips of red cloth. It was not quite such a large company as she had expected from his description.

The leading man looked very old, in spite of a curly wig and dyed moustache. He was an English actor, Jules explained, and had played with Fechter and the Keans.

"I should think he might have acted with David Garrick by the look of him!" observed Phosie.

"Very likely," agreed Jules, who was vague about dates.

This old gentleman had recited, stage managed, and acted titled fathers or faithful old servants in dramatic sketches. A second man, who was photographed in a swallow-tailed coat and grey trousers, had played the piano, sung comic songs, and given what was described on the programme as "a screamingly funny, strictly refined ventriloquial act."

One other man and a lady had completed the company.

These were the photographs which principally interested Phosie. She knitted her brows over the portrait of the young man. His face seemed familiar. Where had she seen him before? Jules marked her expression.

"Think he's a good-looking boy?" he asked, instantly jealous of her interest.

"I seem to remember his face," she answered, in a puzzled voice. "But I can't have seen it before. What was his name?"

"He was an Englishman," said Jules, turning a fold of the red cloth to hide the photograph from her fixed gaze. "He had a good voice and I got him dirt cheap, but he put on 'side,' and we had a row. I was obliged to give him a licking."

"Not an easy thing to do, I should think," said Phosie, quietly returning the case to look at the Englishman again. "What was his name?"

It was the second time she had asked the question. Jules had ignored it before.

"He called himself Frank Race—a fool name—perhaps it was a lie. What do you think of the girl?" he answered, brusquely.

Phosie was bending over the photographs with her elbows on the table. She answered without looking up, studying the face of the lady of the company. It was a thin, delicate face with rather a big mouth, slightly open, hair elaborately curled all over her head, and big, pathetic eyes.

"She looks very fragile with her tiny neck and pointed chin," she answered. "Of course she's pretty, very pretty, but there's something so sad about her face. Was she in bad health or unhappy? What a tragic little person!"

She looked at Jules with a pitying expression, unusually serious for Phosie.

"Does it strike you like that?" he asked, carelessly rising from his chair and going to the fire.

He split a piece of coal with a smart blow of his heel and stood looking down into the sudden flame, with his back towards Phosie and his hands on the mantelpiece. She could not see the expression of his face and did not notice that his hands, at first placed lightly on the edge of the marble, gripped it with so much tension as he went on speaking that his knuckles looked as if they would break through the skin.

"She was not a very strong girl," he said, after a minute. "In fact, she was consumptive. I've never seen a prettier little actress, although she was absolutely without training. But she broke up—quickly. She is dead."

"Oh, Jules!"

Phosie was shocked at the bluntness of the words. He had spoken in abrupt jerks, and there was silence after her exclamation. Phosie felt that the subject was both painful and disagreeable to her companion. She looked at the pretty, weak face of the girl for a long time. There was a certain fascination about it. Then she turned again to the young Englishman. Where had she seen him before? No! She had not seen him. That was her second thought; he only reminded her of somebody else. It was perplexing and troublesome, not the recollection itself, but her failure to make it definite.

When Jules turned round from the fire he had recovered his self-possession and passed into one of his boisterous moods. He took a step up to Phosie and pulled away the case of photographs, folded it together, and thrust it into his pocket.

"I'm sick of the darned old pictures!" he said in his rough way. "I wish I hadn't shown them to you."

"I wish you wouldn't snatch things!" retorted the girl. "It's one of your bad habits, Mr Revell. I want to see them again, please."

"Oh, no, you don't, Phosie."

"Oh, yes, I do, Jules!"

He pulled the packet out of his pocket, but did not give it to her. Sitting down in the low chair by the fire he unfolded the red case and deliberately wrenched out the photographs of the Englishman, Frank Race, and the fragile girl, tearing the cloth with his thick fingers.

Phosie looked on in silent amazement. His face, bent down over his task, was red and scowling. A big vein stood out on his forehead, zigzag between the eyes, and he drew in his lips with the set, sulky look of strength that always oppressed her with a knowledge of his obstinacy and physical force.

He cracked the stiff cards on which the photographs were mounted into four pieces and flung them into the fire, catching up the poker to ram them down into the red hollow of the coals, muttering some words she could not make out between his teeth.

The whole incident had taken less than three minutes, but it left a vivid impression on Euphrosyne's mind of suppressed, unaccountable rage, and brutal violence held in check.

When the bits of cards were fully burnt, but not till then, Jules looked round at her, smiling rather feebly, the dull red colour in his face, which seemed to culminate in the ugly, swollen vein on the forehead, gradually dying away.

He held out his hand to her appealingly, like a school-boy, half repentant, half defiant after a fit of ill temper.

She could not respond. All her sensitive being was jarred. The very air of the room seemed stifling to her, as if it were charged with lurid red flashes of passion, playing round the man whom she had seen so strangely moved.

She was shaken with inward trembling—not fear, but the more subtle sensation of unexpected, overwhelming repugnance.

She turned without a word and ran out of the door. Jules sprang after her, but he was too late. She had

reached the room on the first floor and turned the key in the lock before he could reach it.

He heard her laugh within, for Phosie's moods were as swift as the dart of a swallow. She forgot her impulse of flight in her Puck-like pleasure at the failure of his pursuit. The more she thought of it, the more she laughed, and the more Jules raged.

In vain he rapped and threatened, implored and scolded at the door. She stayed in her fortress, deaf to his entreaties, till Mr Revell came home.

CHAPTER XII

PHOSIE AND AN OLD FRIEND

THE success of Miss Sapio in Hughie's comedy—the clever young playwright with the peculiar-shaped head was named Hewett Addison—steadily increased as the weeks passed.

Hughie lived in his days of triumph as in his days of waiting, quietly and modestly. He had many quaint ideas for future plays, and he discussed them all with Miss Sapio. She was the only person among his numberless friends who knew about the odd, laughable crowd of brain children, long before they saw the light in Hughie's manuscripts, with which he has peopled the modern stage.

He talked about his work when they were in Miss Sapio's little drawing-room, and as she listened, at first with amusement at the young man's interest in his imaginary characters, but soon with greater interest in the characters themselves, she began to be influenced by the innate delicacy and depths of his nature.

Euphrosyne had instinctively shrunk away from her in the old Airy Street days; even her beauty as a younger woman had been hard and brazen, but in the happiness of success, and in the companionship of Addison, she regained something of the lost bloom of her womanhood.

It was despicable to lie to Hughie, because, with all his cleverness, he never seemed to doubt the truth of her foolish stories; she tried to forget the darker chapters in a life of many secret, and even sordid, adventures; she even reached the height of giving up absinthe, and the use of bad language.

Miss Sapio was still a beautiful woman, well into the seventh inch over five feet. The playwright, with that inscrutable face of his, illuminated by the clear, keen vision of the imaginative mind, hardly reached to the level of her eyebrows, but Miss Sapio was afraid of Hewett—afraid of displeasing him, afraid of losing his friendship, afraid of her own unworthiness.

The knowledge of this would have amused Hewett and struck him as Gilbertian, for he had no false illusions about his insignificant appearance, and there was not an ounce of conceit in his whole composition. He would have been even more amused to know that she had persuaded herself that he was good-looking.

It was when she was walking in Hyde Park, a long tramp on a bright December day, that Miss Sapio met with Euphrosyne Moore.

Phosie was alone. Her eyes were on the ground, for she was brooding over Mr Revell, who was ill at home. It was the first day for a week she had left the house.

As she turned down one of the side paths, a few minutes' walk from Marble Arch, to cross the Park in the direction of Kensington, her dog made a rush at another dog approaching from the opposite direction.

There was a great deal of barking and scuffling on the part of the dogs, accompanied by whistling and commands of their owners, before Taffy and his enemy would listen to reason. Phosie, seizing her excited Welsh terrier by the collar, began to apologise to the mistress of the flurried and indignant chow. But the words died away, and her first stare of blank amazement changed into a flash of pleasure.

"Miss Sapio!" she cried.

"Good Lord! It's Eddy Moore's little kid!" exclaimed the lady.

Delighted to hear her father's name, Phosie forgot all about the straining Taffy, let him go, and literally threw herself into Miss Sapio's arms. She was lost in an equally

effusive embrace—smothered among Miss Sapio's furs, while she was kissed a dozen times in the midst of the perfume of violets and the soft fluff against her cheeks of a delicately-scented powder.

"Oh, my stars-and-what-do-you-call-'ems!" exclaimed Miss Sapio, holding the girl at arm's length and then smothering her again. "How the child has grown. How well you look! Upon my word! Give him to me, Hughie, for pity's sake."

She clutched her chow out of Mr Addison's arms while Phosie turned her attention once more to the capture of her own dog.

"This is Euphrosyne, the dearest, merriest little grig in the world!" continued Miss Sapio to Hughie. "Mr Hewett Addison—Miss Moore."

Hughie lifted his hat and saw, by her unchanged expression, that Miss Moore was not a theatre-goer. She had never heard of Mr Hewett Addison.

"Where are you going all by yourself?" asked her old friend. "Do you still live in that pig-sty off Edgware Road?"

Phosie gave a brief sketch of her life since the time they parted.

They all walked on together, the chow tucked under Miss Sapio's arm, while Taffy strained at the lead.

"So your poor dad got himself smashed?" said Miss Sapio. "Poor old fellow! You'd have liked Phosie's father, Hughie, he was the kindest, simplest soul! And now you've been adopted at the British Museum, have you? Well, I hope they treat you properly and let you have plenty to eat and drink."

Phosie hastened to explain that Mr Revell had given her a home in his private capacity, not on behalf of the nation. Miss Sapio was under the impression that she lodged and boarded at the Museum.

"I suppose you're rich?" continued her questioner.

Phosie laughed.

"Oh, no," she replied. "Mr Revell gives me a few shillings a week, but I'm afraid I don't save any money. You see I have Little Gus to take care of."

"Who's Little Gus? That brute of a dog?"

"No, it is a boy. He is my greatest friend. We ran away together."

"Eloped!" cried Miss Sapio in a voice that made the people within hearing stare at her. "Good heavens, child! You're not married?"

"No, no!" answered Phosie. "Little Gus is younger than I am—he's like a brother. Of course I'm not married."

"I should hope not! No girl ought to be married at your age. I'm sure you agree with me, Hughie?"

"I don't know Miss Moore's age," said Addison, smiling at her in his friendly way.

"You gave me quite a turn!" said Miss Sapio. "It's made me feel positively faint. I don't think I can walk any farther. Suppose we get a cab, Hughie, and both of you come and have a bit of lunch with me?"

"Thank you very much, but I must not be away from home for very long," said Phosie. "Mr Revell is ill and he will miss me."

"I'll let you go directly we've stuffed," said Miss Sapio. "Will you come, Hughie?"

"M—yes, I've nothing better to do just now," said Addison.

Phosie thought this acceptance of an invitation somewhat ungracious, till she caught the smile of mutual understanding between her friend and the odd-looking, grave young man.

They found the retired comedian, Mr Quizzical Quilter, reading a newspaper in Miss Sapio's tiny drawing-room, with a glass of whisky-and-water on the table beside him. He had invited himself to lunch, but his hostess, after slapping him on the back and observing that she liked his cheek, seemed very pleased to have him. She

introduced him in an effusive manner to her new guest.

"This is my dear old pal, Mr Quizzical Quilter, known to all the world as Quizzy."

The old gentleman, who was quite sober and smartly dressed, with a vivid red waistcoat, shook Phosie quite affectionately by the hand, giving her a characteristic greeting:

"How de do? God bless you! Many happy returns!"

While they were having lunch, which was elegantly cooked and served, Miss Sapio questioned Phosie about her dancing.

"I haven't forgotten the steps you taught me," said the girl.

"Think of that!" exclaimed Miss Sapio, turning to Addison. "This little lady has got the most beautiful 'point' I've ever come across. It's natural to her. You must see her dance."

"Oh, Miss Sapio! I can't dance properly," interrupted Phosie, with flushed cheeks.

Mr Quizzical Quilter, whose attention hitherto had been entirely concentrated on his plate, laid down his knife and fork and wagged his head from side to side, pulling his mouth square and squinting horribly at Phosie.

"Never say die, my pet!" he exclaimed. "Don't get fluffy! You're among friends. We're all goin' to be hung on the same gallers!"

Having thus proffered his professional encouragement, Quizzy allowed the pupils of his eyes to roll back to their proper position and returned to his food pell-mell.

Miss Sapio, struck with an idea which prevented her from noticing the interruption, glanced at Phosie and Addison alternately for several minutes without speaking.

Then she banged the table with her clenched hand.

"By Jove, I've got it!" she ejaculated, and the play-

wright looked at her in sudden admiration, for her fine eyes flashed with excitement.

"What have you got, Flo?" he asked curiously.

"A bright idea, my boy!"

"Is that all?" said Addison, coolly. "I've got dozens. They flock round me whenever I deign to take any notice of them."

"But you're a genius, Hughie," put in his friend.

"Tell us the idea," he went on. "You'll never get another till you've worked it out, my dear Florence. That's the way of ideas; a second rarely takes definite shape until one has completed a first."

"You shall write a little pantomime for Phosie and I'll teach her the steps!" said Miss Sapio. "What do you think of it?"

"Cap-i-tal!" observed Quizzy. The word "pantomime" appealed to him.

"What do you mean? A little story without words?" asked Addison. "Do you want to drive Miss Moore on to the stage?"

"Why not?" said Miss Sapio, warming to her subject. "She is wholly dependent on this old gentleman who keeps the British Museum. What would happen if he died? Don't look shocked, child. People do die, even the best of them."

"Gentleman might hop the twig any minute—poor old boy!" agreed Quizzy, who was at leisure as he sipped his coffee to join in the conversation.

"I suppose you want me to invent something suitable for music-halls?" said Addison, looking at Phosie with new interest.

"Of course I do, dear!" said Miss Sapio. "There's no opening for anything of that kind in an ordinary theatre. Will you try it, Hughie? Does it appeal to you? What do you say?"

"I think Miss Moore is the one to be consulted first," said Addison.

Phosie's colour had come and gone, but her lips were smiling and the old light of adventure shone in her eyes.

It struck the playwright, for the first time, that she was a very captivating little person. He blamed himself for not perceiving when they met in the Park the possible charm of her quick changes of expression.

"I shall be only too pleased—if I can do anything—but I'm so untrained—so ignorant—" She stopped as abruptly as she had begun to speak, overcome with shyness.

"Good!" said Miss Sapio, clapping her hands. "I knew you were a sensible little soul. We'll make your fortune. How do you think of working out the idea, Hughie?"

Addison rose with a laugh to open the door.

"You must give me time, my dear Flo. I shall have to think it over."

"Authors can't be drove," observed Quizzy, as he followed the ladies upstairs, cigar in hand. "I know the way of authors. I've met scores of 'em. They're the most annoyin' lot of men."

"Why do you think that?" asked Addison, who professed great respect for the old clown's opinions.

"They fuss! They grumble! They're always interferin'," answered Mr Quilter. "I've known managers who didn't dare put a speech into a play—a play they'd bought, mind you—without consultin' the author! It's ridiculous. Authors won't let you gag. They think they know the public better than you do! They want to be original. They want to have it all their own way, as if it was anything to do with them how you act their plays! It's sickenin', my boy. If I had a theatre I'd never let an author inside the doors. They screw a percentage out of your earnings, and what more do they want?"

The indignant old gentleman re-lighted his cigar and puffed great clouds of smoke through his nostrils.

Addison had listened to his outburst with great attention.

"You're quite right, Quizzy," he said. "Authors ought not to be allowed to see their own plays acted. It only makes them conceited or miserable, and in either case it gives them a false notion of their own importance. But I really think they deserve to be paid. After all, Quizzy, they've got to buy boots and support their families like their superiors."

"Just so!" agreed Mr Quilter. "But if you look at it from the manager's point of view, it's hard lines to see so much of his profits goin' into another man's pockets, isn't it? The least authors can do is to make 'emself agreeable, but they don't!"

"No?" queried Addison.

"God bless my soul! I ought to know," said Quizzy, "for I've had to do with the whole lot—drama, comedy, burlesque, tragedy—but I must say they've got a little more sense when they write panto. There they give the actors a free hand, and what's the result? We cut out half the rubbish the author has written and make a success. There you are! It's as plain"—he concluded, turning to Miss Sapio—"it's as plain as the nose on your face! I can't put it more emphatically than that—it's as plain as your nose, my dear."

Phosie, who had waited patiently during Quizzy's discourse on authors, now entreated her friend to let her go. She was anxious about Mr Revell.

"I won't keep you a minute longer, sweetie," said Miss Sapio. "But you really must do the 'point' once, if you can still manage it, for Mr Addison to see."

"Do you mean stand on my toes?"

Phosie, blushing again at being the centre of observation, lifted her skirt daintily and walked across the room on the tips of her toes with the ease and grace of an accomplished *prima ballerina*.

"Now see if you can dance a bit like that!" com-

manded Miss Sapio, and she whistled a lively tune. Mr Quizzical Quilter joined in with snapping fingers.

Of course Phosie's attempts to the observant eyes of Hewett Addison, who had seen all the dancers worth seeing of his generation, at once showed her lack of training, but after a few seconds he forgot to look at the steps in his admiration of the girl.

She smiled continually, but it was not the set smile of the stage dancer, being absolutely un-self-conscious, caused by an inner fancy too delicate for words, while her little feet gave Addison the impression of dancing on notes, as if they tapped the music out of the ground. She possessed the captivation of a child, earnestly doing her best, mingled with the light-hearted, irresponsible joy of a being untouched by care and ignorant of evil.

"Dainty! Dainty!" cried Addison, with an enthusiasm which surprised his friends, when Miss Sapio's whistling ended in a breathless pant, and Phosie stopped in the middle of a wild and original pirouette, breaking the spell she had thrown over the level-headed playwright.

"Isn't she a duck?" asked Miss Sapio. "Have you ever seen such a 'point'?"

"I endorse the sentiment, Flo," said Quizzy, before Addison could reply. "This young lady is a perfect duck—a duck and green peas, my pet, and don't forget the taters!"

He placed his hand on his heart and bowed low to the dancer, accompanying his compliment with one of the most hideous grimaces of which his india-rubber face was capable. Phosie's eyes twinkled. Mr Quilter flattered himself he had made a conquest.

"I will try to write a sketch worthy of my subject," said Addison.

"How kind you are!" exclaimed Phosie.

"He's the kindest, best Hughie on earth!" said Miss

Sapio. "If he says he'll do a thing, he always does it. Give me your address, dearie, and directly Mr Addison has got his idea on paper I'll drop you a line."

She sat down at her little writing-table, scattering notes and bills on to the floor in a search for her address-book. Addison rose and neatly picked it out of a pigeon-hole in the desk.

"Why, there it was all the time!" said Miss Sapio, and tipped the ink-bottle over with her sleeve.

Addison took up the blotting-book, tore out several sheets, and quickly mopped up the black pool.

"Don't be so impetuous!" he said. "We have eternity before us, my dear Flo."

Miss Sapio, who had bitten a foul word off the tip of her tongue, compressed her lips and looked up into his face as he bent over the desk.

"I'm sorry, Hughie!" she said in a low, humble voice.

"You ought to be glad that your ink-bottle was nearly empty," he rejoined, and went back to his seat.

Miss Sapio wrote down Phosie's address, kissed her many times, and said once more they would make her fortune.

Mr Quizzical Quilter bade her a jocular farewell, sending his love to the old folks at home, and Hewett Addison, who took her to the door, watched her from the steps until she disappeared.

He returned in a thoughtful mood to the drawing-room. Quizzy had settled himself for a nap by the fire. Miss Sapio was still sitting at the writing-desk, her cheek resting on her hand, staring into vacancy. Hewett drew a chair close.

"What a fairy that girl is!" he said. "What a pretty little creature. Everything seems to give her pleasure. I never came across any girl who laughed so readily without being stupid."

"She's good and happy. If we women could only

keep our youth and innocence, Hughie—" said his companion, and she pressed her hand against her mouth, as if she feared to say too much.

He looked at her seriously for a minute, with the thoughtful expression deepening in his face.

"What is the matter, Flo? What have I said to trouble you?" he asked.

Her eyes flashed and she brought her hand smartly down on the desk, making Quizzy start and snort, before he again settled into a comfortable position.

"I'm a devil, Hughie!" said Miss Sapio. "I want to love that child, I do love her, but when you speak of her like that, and look at her as you did—she's so young and fresh—and I—"

Addison sighed. He was never jealous himself, and he could not understand jealousy in others.

"My dear Flo, if I am to talk to you at all I must say what I please," he said. "I do admire your little friend. She is rare and exquisite. A wave of delight from God."

Miss Sapio laid her head down on her arm, hiding her face. Addison quickly moved away a little vase of flowers which was in danger of being overturned.

"Don't be foolish, Flo!" he remonstrated. "Don't confuse the artist with the man. What is the strength, the very foundation of our good fellowship? Sincerity. To be sincere with each other, you and I must be free to say what we like, to praise whom we choose, to enlarge, not to cramp, our capacity for enjoyment and work. You see what I mean?"

"I see what you mean, Hughie," she murmured, without lifting her head.

"Then don't be so unreasonable as to be annoyed with me for admiring a flower, or a bird, or the gaiety of a girl. Why, Flo—"

He glanced over his shoulder. Quilter was asleep. Hewett stooped over Miss Sapio and kissed her hair.

She raised her head and looked at him with bright, incredulous eyes, her whole face a yearning question.

The level-headed playwright moved hastily over to the fire and began to talk on indifferent subjects.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THREE MONTHS

EUPHROSYNE'S meeting with Miss Sapio had taken place in mid-winter.

By the time the daffodils were burning in the small garden of Henry Revell's house, like pale yellow flames springing from beneath the swift feet of the Spring, all the world had changed for her. Even Little Gus was aware of the evolution of events. He took everything philosophically. A new adjective had lately seized upon his fancy. He said that all things were inevitable, from a thunder-storm to breaking a tea-cup. So when Mr Revell's illness became serious Little Gus consoled himself very successfully, but failed to console Phosie, by saying it was inevitable.

"It seems as if it was to be!" he said at intervals, with the kind intention of explaining his favourite word. "And when a thing is to be, why not say it's inevitable?" Little Gus appeared to find great satisfaction in the unanswerableness of his argument.

Jules Revell, for very different reasons, contemplated the probable death of his uncle with resignation. As a rule he was sympathetic with Phosie's anxiety, always asking the right questions and repeating the expected commonplaces, but the atmosphere of the quiet house affected his nerves.

He was irritable with Mrs Bird and Gus, even with Phosie herself on occasion, and could hardly conceal his inward impatience with Mr Revell. When a man is old

and ill, he argued, the least he can do is to die as quickly as possible for everybody's sake.

Phosie found him more oppressive than ever. There was never a repetition, or even a shadow, of the dark anger which she had seen in Jules on the day he burnt the photographs. He was more reserved than she had known him, almost secretive in his manner of coming and going. She had no idea of how he spent his life away from The Stroll.

The easy friendship of the days when he first appeared upon the scene changed between them to a feeling that was strained and provocative. It was in the air. Phosie saw how she affected him, against her own will, and knew that he loved her, but at the same time he was baffled, hurt, almost frightened by her absolute power of standing aloof.

Phosie possessed, without knowing it, not only the gift of right choice, but a nature which was wholly unswayed by another's passion. She could pity, she was responsive to all affection, but the sacred fire of her love was not to be easily kindled.

Jules loved her for the very qualities he would have destroyed, for while her personal beauty, the sole attraction in his eyes when first they met, captivated him as much as ever, he had grown insensibly to speculate, to ponder, over the secret of the charm of personality of which beauty itself is but one of many manifestations. But too essentially coarse-fibred to cherish what was best in his own nature, he called himself a fool during those weeks of indecision, little knowing that only in the reverence and hesitation of his attitude was he worthy to be called her lover.

Mr Revell had listened to the girl's description of her visit to Miss Sapio's house with pleasure and amusement. He had apparently taken some interest in the theatre in his young days, and told her lengthy stories of the success of Charles Matthews, Buckstone, Helen Faucit,

and other worthies of the great Victorian days. He insisted on Phosie repeating her visit to her old friend, although she hated to leave him alone, and made her practise a dance, arranged by Miss Sapiro and Addison, in his room.

Mr Revell, who had long suffered without complaint from a painful internal malady, lived the last months of his life in his own methodical, conscientious way.

Phosie wrote long letters, of which he dictated a part every day, to his old friends in France and Surrey. The old friend in Surrey, making a supreme effort, travelled all the way to London for the sake of passing a few hours in his company.

Phosie, who had long known him as the "My dear Herbert" of her guardian's correspondence, had hardly been prepared for quite such an old, old gentleman. He walked with two sticks and grumbled incessantly at a long-suffering, but evidently devoted, man-servant.

Dear Herbert and Mr Revell did not seem to agree on any subject they discussed. Phosie sat and wondered at their strange idea of affection, but when they parted she saw the glint of brightness that was not caused by petulance in the eyes of the irascible old gentleman from Surrey, and after seeing him out she found Mr Revell in a very calm and happy mood.

"Phosie dear," he said, taking the hand she laid on the arm of his chair, "I am very thankful to heaven for having given me a true friend like Herbert. He is the only man in the world with whom I have discussed all topics, all, without fear or reservation. On the face of it, that doesn't sound very much, but when you are older, Phosie, you will know—" he broke off, with a gentle smile. "No, you will never know, my little Phosie, but men like myself understand how difficult it is to overcome the limitations, the superstitions, the barriers between mind and mind. Yes, I am very thankful to Heaven for such a friend as Herbert."

There were a few other visitors: Mr Revell's married sister, severe and elderly, who treated Phosie with becoming haughtiness; his lawyer, to whom Jules was almost too cordial and subservient, a new phase of his character over which Phosie pondered; three or four of his colleagues from the Museum; a distinguished politician, who snatched several hours from his crowded days to drive down to The Stroll to cheer an old friend; and a certain young nobleman, at whose father's house Mr Revell had occasionally visited.

He was an agreeable, simple youth, whose kindness to dear Mr Revell was encouraged by his agreeable, simple mother, little suspecting that the penniless, low-born girl whom dear Mr Revell had befriended could have become, had she chosen, the young nobleman's wife.

Phosie, not liking him, did not tell her guardian about his proposal. She confided the incident to Miss Lily Parlow, at the house next door, and that young lady's amazement at the brilliance of the offer, and horror at its rejection, struck Phosie with equal amusement. She wished the opportunity had come to Lily instead. Lily would have made an adorable dolly of a countess!

For a little while, before the last harassing fortnight of Mr Revell's life, Euphrosyne and her guardian passed through a memorable time of companionship and perfect sympathy. They were drawn together by the bond of her gratitude and his need for human tenderness.

There was no sadness in those restful days; it seemed to Phosie as if all life, all interest, was centred in the room where he sat.

The world of action was shut out. She hardly noticed the dark presence of Jules. She had moved her bed into a little room next to Mr Revell's, to be within call at any hour. He liked her to read aloud as of old, and she often carried one or another of his art treasures to his side, to be handled and admired.

He had made her a present of the quaint ring of turquoise hearts out of the locked drawer, and often lifted her hand to look at his gift, accompanying the action with a little compliment, for he believed that young ladies of Phosie's age expected and had a right to little compliments.

"You will soon be under the hammer, my friend!" Mr Revell would often say to a piece of pottery, as a kind of farewell, as he restored it to the girl's careful fingers.

He told her the old anecdotes with the old relish, seeming to forget the present in his recollection of the past. There was a startling change in his look and bearing during those quiet weeks. He shrunk into great age. The old-fashioned rings slipped off his fingers; his face was the colour of a faded sheet of white paper; his voice was thin and sounded far away; his eyes looked very blue and serene.

One day Phosie went into the room carrying a very beautiful medallion of St. Guistina in her two hands. It was the work of an Italian artist, whose cunning hand had long since returned to the dust from which it was created, but whose spirit lived in the undying beauty of his work. Henry Revell had found this treasure in a little shop in Florence, grimed with the dirt and dust of years. How often had Phosie heard him describe the joy of restoring the pure and lovely face to the light.

He looked at it silently for several minutes, then he turned to the living face of the young girl.

"Take it away, Phosie," he said; "let it be the last of the fine works of man for me to look upon. Do not bring anything else, my dear—never again."

She returned in a couple of minutes, and he spoke once more, as if finishing the speech he had begun.

"I have done with all these things. My work is over," he said.

Phosie laid her cheek against his shoulder and twisted

her fingers round his cold hand. They stayed so, silent, for a long time.

"I can't thank you! I can't speak of it!" she said softly. "But I shall never, never forget how you took us in, Gus and I, and what you have been to us all these years. My dearest! Oh, my dearest friend!"

Mr Revell pressed her fingers.

"Hush! Hush!" he whispered. "You mustn't cry like this. I have never seen you cry before. Hush, my child! You have done far more for me than I ever did for you. You have made this dull house a home. You brought in the sunshine with you on that summer morning three years ago. My little Euphrosyne—rightly named! The old gods have passed, but not our living faith in their heavenly attributes. Euphrosyne always imparted gentleness and grace to the lives of men. She does so still, always patient, always obliging, always amiable!"

His old-fashioned words, spoken in his old precise way, touched her deeply. He patted her shoulder and passed his hand over her hair.

"Just like a daughter!" he said. "My own little girl!"

Three weeks after he had spoken these words—the most loving that Phosie had ever heard from his lips—Henry Revell died.

Jules, who had had no affection for his uncle, at once assumed the position of master of the house.

Little Gus was frightened and subdued by the presence of death.

The faithful housekeeper became hysterical, her fits of laughter and tears being mingled with a not unpleasant sense of importance on the day of the funeral.

It was Phosie alone who grieved for her guardian, missed his step, and longed for the sound of the kind voice forever silent.

CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH THE STORM

“ IF one could always smell the sulphur, how easy it would be to avoid the Devil! ”

Mr Revell had once said those words, jestingly, when comparing Goethe's conception of Mephistopheles with that of Marlowe, and Phosie had thought to herself, after the way of youth, that good and evil were always distinguishable.

Men and women, to her, were divided into good and bad, white or black; she knew nothing of the moral greys of the world, and while she understood complexity of character in tastes and opinions, her inexperience made no allowance for an equal complexity in conduct and motives.

She never dreamed that insidious Temptation, with fatal Ignorance, can assume the pleasing forms of Welcome Guests, the one wrapped in a mantle of false illusion, the other trailing in the dust the bright wings of Love himself.

When Jules Revell came into her life Phosie, in spite of the oppression of his masterful personality, accepted him in all good faith at his own valuation.

She did not particularly like him, but there were times when her indifference warmed into friendship and they seemed in harmony with each other. It was then in his power to influence and attract her. Such times were rare, but the thought of them swept Jules off his feet.

Only his self-control, so difficult to shake, kept him

from betraying himself to the girl in extravagant words and deeds. All unknowingly she had brought him to heel, never realising how she excited, and at the same time held in check, a violent, and hitherto wholly self-indulgent, nature.

It was a fortnight after Mr Revell's funeral. Mrs Bird, whose sorrow for her old master and agitation over his burial had rendered her useless in the house, was spending the day with her relatives in Peckham.

Gus's depression had given place to his usual cheerfulness, enhanced by the importance of executing little commissions at neighbouring shops in his sombre suit of mourning.

Jules had gone to the city in the morning to keep an appointment with his late uncle's lawyer. Nothing had yet been decided about the disposal of Mr Revell's property. His will was deposited at the lawyer's office, and although there had been several consultations with Mr Faraday, of Messrs Faraday & Boyton, Jules had not told Phosie any particulars.

She had known nothing of her guardian's affairs, and how his death would affect her own position had not yet entered into her calculations.

The house in The Stroll had been her home for so long, she was so accustomed to living there, that even the prospect of appearing in Hewett Addison's sketch did not change her thoughts of the future. She supposed it would mean paying rent to Jules, whom she concluded would go away, leaving Mrs Bird to let rooms and manage the house.

It was late afternoon when Jules returned from the lawyer's office. He was in high spirits, and, meeting Gus in the street, gave him some money to spend on delicacies for supper.

"Have you good news, Jules?" asked Phosie, when he entered the breakfast-room where she was sewing.

"Yes—great!" he answered, shovelling coal on the fire before he pulled off his big Canadian fur coat and thick gloves.

"I'm so glad!" she exclaimed, laying down her work.

"Well—good news for me," he went on, with slight hesitation. "But I don't know whether it will be pleasing to you, Phosie. We shall see. I'll tell you this evening. Is the Birdie coming home?"

"Yes, but not till late. She has a key."

"Then we shall be able to have a good business talk. We'll enjoy ourselves. I'm sure we've been miserable long enough."

He laughed as he spoke, and she looked at him in some surprise.

"I don't think you have been particularly miserable, Jules," she observed.

"You wouldn't have me a hypocrite, Phosie?"

"Oh, no! I didn't mean to say anything unkind, but it seems strange to talk about enjoying ourselves—here—so soon."

Jules shrugged his shoulders impatiently and laughed again; then, seeing her expression as she picked up her work, straightened his face and answered in a voice of serious reproach.

"We can't measure grief by time, Phosie. I didn't love my dear uncle any the less because I don't rave about it. If you like to think me heartless, you must. I've been misunderstood before. It isn't my fault, it's my misfortune. I can bear it, even from you."

Phosie sprang up, all contrition and sympathy.

"Forgive me, Jules!" she cried, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

He was staring gloomily into the fire.

"You don't know me, Phosie," he said, without looking round. "I'm such a rough, uncouth sort of fellow. I don't know how to talk to women. I've never had anything to do with them in any way, for I'm different

from other men. Why, I never cared to have a girl for a friend till I met you."

He had chosen his words shrewdly. She was more contrite, sympathetic and flattered, touched by the sadness in his voice and believing him implicitly.

The timely arrival of Little Gus saved her from humbling herself entirely. She was ashamed of her cruelty. How could she have thought Jules indifferent? What was her loss compared to his?

Miss Lily Parlow joined them at supper, by Phosie's invitation. She looked very sweet in the black frock she had put on as suitable to the occasion, and Jules expressed his admiration in stealthy glances.

He imagined, quite wrongly, that Phosie was acting the spy, and enjoyed his own skill in carrying on a flirtation without being suspected. Had he been sure of her he would have behaved very differently, for then it would have been good sport to let her know what he was doing and make her wretched with jealousy.

Lily was pleased with herself and ogled Gus and Jules with quiet complacency. She thought they were both in love with her, being at the age when young ladies secretly enact romantic love scenes in their minds with every unmarried man whom they meet.

Little Gus, revelling in muffins, was far too engrossed to be fascinated, but Jules thought her a most winning little person, and contrived to tell her so, unheard by the others, several times during the evening.

After supper they sat round the fire and roasted chestnuts. Lily and Jules carried on the conversation, encouraged in their small attempts at wit by the appreciation of Gus, who was ready to laugh whether he saw the point of a joke or not.

Phosie sat in silence. Now and again Jules glanced at her thoughtful face and his attention wandered for a second from the matter in hand, but he made no effort to draw her into the talk.

As the clock struck half-past nine Miss Lily Parlow rose, shook the bits of chestnut in her skirt on to the hearth, and said she must go, having promised to be home by five-and-twenty minutes to ten. She was always punctual to a minute.

Jules and Gus took her to the door, the former escorting her in all gallantry down the steps of the house and up the steps next door.

Phosie pulled the blind in the breakfast-room on one side and craned her neck to watch them go.

It was a dark, stormy night. She saw how the gaunt branches of the plane trees shivered, and the great lilac bush in the garden dipped and curved to one side under the lash of the wind.

Jules, after exchanging a few cordial words with Mrs Parlow, who admitted her daughter, returned to his own house, shutting the door noisily behind him. Phosie heard him talking to Little Gus in the hall, and then the latter, leaning over the banisters, called out:

"Good night, Phosie! Jules says I look so tired, so I'm going to bed."

"Oh, very well, dear. Good-night!" she replied.

Jules re-entered the breakfast-room just as she turned from the window.

"It's as cold as charity!" he said, with a shake of his shoulders. "Can't you hear the wind howling? Let's have a log on the fire."

"It is hardly worth while so late," she answered, but Jules had fetched the log and thrown it on the sinking embers without noticing what she said. It crackled and spluttered and threw out little sparks of fire.

"That's better!" he exclaimed, giving the log, as he was fond of doing, a smart kick with his heel. "Now we can have our talk."

"Not to-night," said Phosie. "I'm tired, and it's nearly a quarter to eleven."

"Oh, yes, I won't keep you long—it's awfully im-

portant!" he said earnestly. "Do sit down for a moment. I promised Mr Faraday to tell you at once. Please, Phosie! Only five minutes!"

"Oh, very well."

She sat down again in the low chair. Jules crossed the room and closed the door. Then he seated himself on the other side of the hearth. She looked at him expectantly, but he seemed to find it difficult to begin.

"What have you to tell me?" she asked, after waiting for a minute.

"About my interview with the lawyer," said Jules, "about my uncle's will, Phosie."

"Yes?"

Again he hesitated. The log still hissed on the fire. She thrust out her foot to extinguish a spark upon the rug. The sound of the wind, which they had not noticed during the early part of the evening, was growing more shrill and loud every minute.

"My uncle has left directions that his collection of pottery here, and the things he kept at his bank, are to be sold by auction. They ought to realise a very fair amount. He was not a rich man, but he has left quite a tidy little sum of money. Everything is specified in the will. This house is a freehold. Of course it is also mentioned in the will."

"You are his heir?" asked Phosie.

The frequent repetition of the word will, and Jules's evident, if suppressed, excitement in what he had to say, jarred on her.

"I am his heir," he replied slowly. "I am his sole heir. He leaves me everything, except a small legacy to his doctor—everything! Do you realise what that means, Phosie?"

He leaned forward, eagerly studying her face. She pondered for some seconds. Then her expression changed.

"I suppose it means that I—"

"You are penniless!" interrupted Jules Revell. "He forgot all about you. His will was only made a year ago, but he doesn't mention you. What do you say to that?"

"I say that he never forgot me!" she retorted, with a flash of anger. "He was my dearest, kindest friend always. I will not reproach him—no, not for a single minute in my inmost thoughts. I congratulate you on your good fortune, Jules, but you needn't waste your pity on me, for I don't want it. Do you think I'm going to break my heart over money? No, indeed! The world is too happy a place for that."

She rose and moved towards the door. A muffled sound of thunder rumbled in the distance and the howl of the wind was deadened into a moan.

Jules sprang up and threw himself in front of her, clutching at both her hands and pulling her slowly, but forcibly, towards him. She resisted his effort, more in surprise at the suddenness of the action than in anger.

She put her hands on his shoulders, for he had let them go, and tried in vain to push him off, but he only drew her more strongly into his embrace.

"It is all yours!" he exclaimed. "Everything I have is yours! I love you—you know how I worship you! Phosie—no—no—don't be frightened—Phosie! I love you! I want to marry you—now, Phosie—don't be foolish—"

She hardly heard what he said. All the oppression of all the months she had known him enveloped her spirit. She struggled wildly for freedom—for literal freedom with the strength of every muscle, and for moral freedom from the mastery and violence of his soul against hers.

For a few seconds, she could not tell how long, she was conscious of the fierce lock of his arms, of the terrible nearness of his face, eyes glaring into eyes, his breath

on her cheek—then they were apart, with the table between them.

They bent towards each other, panting. There was a gleam of lightning, a near peal of thunder, and the lash, lash of rain against the windows.

“Are you mad?” gasped Phosie, pushing back her disordered hair. “Have you gone mad? How dare you—dare you—Jules! How dare you—”

He recovered himself quickly. She saw how his big chest rose and fell more and more evenly; his face regained its usual colour, but the zigzag, swollen vein on his forehead still seemed to throb. He pressed his clenched, shaking hands down upon the table and looked at them, slowly spreading out the fingers till they were all flat and quiet.

There was tense silence. She partly understood the struggle for self-control going on in the man before her. She was inwardly trembling herself, and in that few minutes, as she watched him, the ignorance of her childhood was gone. Fear swept over her. The room was like a trap.

Slowly, stiffly, Jules raised his head, as if it cost him an effort to look at her.

By one of those strange revulsions of feeling that seize upon a woman in the midst of such a storm of emotion, she was suddenly sorry for him.

“Forgive me! I forgot myself!” he said in a quiet, restrained voice. “Don’t be cruel to me, Phosie. I promise—I swear not to frighten you again. We must fight it out some time, you and I! Let it be to-night.”

She moved away from the table, pressed her hand to her eyes for a second, and then laid it unsteadily on the back of a chair.

“What is there to say, Jules? To-morrow!” she sighed

“To-night!” he repeated hoarsely. “I can’t wait. You must listen to me! You must!”

Phosie was obliged to sink into her chair. She was

weak and faint. He knelt down beside her and she shrank away.

"Oh, don't!" he pleaded. "I only want to tell you of my love. You see your power. You can make me do anything you please."

She rested her head against the back of the chair, listening to the rain—listening to the man—apparently dazed, but alert in mind and still afraid—horrible! Horrible!

Jules implored her to marry him. He poured out his desires in a stream of thick, eloquent words. He urged his suit in the wildest and most extravagant terms of praise, endearment and flattery.

He reproached her bitterly for the terror she had shown. He implored her to trust him, only to trust him, that was the keynote of it all.

He would show her the depths from which she had raised him! He forgot her youth. He forgot her innocent outlook on a world of which she knew so little, but he did not forget to paint his story in the false colours of spurious romance.

The fire burnt low. The storm without had spent its fury.

Jules had taken her hands. They lay cold and still in his. He was tired with his own vehemence, and even his voice was hoarse, but he went on repeating, in different words, all the arguments that were plausible, passionate, bewildering.

Phosie was pale as death. Her hair was pushed back and her forehead was set into a stern, unchanging frown. Her half-closed eyelids quivered, and her young face looked as if it were drawn and puckered with age.

Suddenly Jules bent down and kissed her hands, without raising them, as they rested passively in his.

His lips were burning.

A shudder passed over her at his touch. She opened her eyes, as if she had been asleep, and rose to her feet.

He, too, sprang up and waited, breathlessly, bending towards her.

"It is impossible, Jules," she said. "I do not love you, and even if I did, I would not marry you."

An exclamation broke from his lips, but she lifted her hand for silence and spoke again—strange words from a girl of eighteen:

"You tell me you have lived a wicked life. You are not ashamed of this, but I am—for your sake. I will never marry you. You are not good enough to be my husband."

She turned and left him. All her fear and anger were gone.

Slowly, wearily, she mounted the dark stairs. The gas was burning in the little strip of passage outside her room. As she put up her hand to turn it out she heard a step behind her, and stopped, her arm still raised.

It was Jules.

She moved away from the gas to the open door of her room. Their eyes met. He put both hands on the wall on either side of the door, bent forward and spoke to her. She heard what he said. As he stooped lower, trying to whisper, she put up her hand, higher and higher, till it was laid on his throat.

A pulse seemed to hammer under her palm. She looked at him steadily and sadly—a long, brave look without flinching—and all the while her hand pressed him gently back.

They understood each other. His eyes drooped before her, but her own were luminous and wide and never wavered an instant. Their mute struggle ended. Without another word he turned and went away.

Phosie raised the blind in her room, knelt down by the window, and lifted her face to the sky.

It was still black and lowering and wind-swept, but one bright star shone in the east.

CHAPTER XV

GOOD-BYE TO THE STROLL

WHEN Phosie looked out of her window, the morning after the storm, the world seemed to have been drenched in tears.

The leaden sky was empty, washed out; the walls of surrounding houses might all have been painted brown under cover of darkness for their look of gloom and similarity. Trees and bushes were still heavy with rain, and the long, dank grass in the garden was beaten flat.

Phosie had slept little, disturbed by ugly dreams. She had heard the housekeeper return home at about midnight.

She opened her door and listened. There was not a sound in the house. It was still very early.

Refreshed by the mere thought of cold water, she washed and dressed, wrapped herself in a shawl, spread the coverlet tidily, and began to empty the chest of drawers, putting her small stock of clothes in little neat piles upon her bed.

She also took her books out of the hanging bookshelf, and two or three framed photographs of famous pictures, Mr Revell's gifts, off the walls, dusting each one carefully. Then she cleaned her boots and put them on, putting her house shoes and bedroom slippers beside the tiny bundles of underclothes.

Her best dress was laid on the pillow of the bed, together with her glove-box, containing one new pair and two fancy handkerchiefs; her hair ribbons—Phosie loved vivid hair ribbons; the necklace Miss Sapio had

given her years ago at Airy Street; and a pretty chiffon scarf, greatly prized, which had been Lily Parlow's present on her last birthday.

Then she counted her money. Well! She had run away from Airy Street with less. This was poor consolation, but it was better than none at all. Her amount of portable property was not imposing, but while she was getting it ready to be packed in the trunk she would have to buy her expression had been bright, satisfied, animated. She did not allow herself time for reflection until her preparations were completed.

The distant sound of Mrs Bird pulling up blinds, unbolting doors and raking out the kitchen stove—Mrs Bird's household spiriting was always of a noisy, bustling order—told Phosie that she was no longer alone in the house, awake among dreamers, but that another day had begun for them all, and with the knowledge came the overwhelming recollection of why she must escape from her home of years.

This house belonged to Jules Revell, and she could accept nothing from his hand.

She could never be his friend again. She knew he would marry her, for he had implored her to marry him, but there were minutes during their extraordinary interview of the previous night which were branded on her memory.

She felt old in the thought of these minutes—shamed, humiliated—the bloom of her youth brushed off by the hand of a thief. She covered her face with her hands and burst into passionate tears, scalding, difficult tears, that choke in the throat and make the temples throb.

All her gay, happy spirit was overshadowed by the vague, instinctive horror of a woman who has trembled on the brink of—she knows not what—who has looked into depths she cannot fathom, who has been saved from unspeakable misery.

For a few minutes she wept, and even moaned aloud, without thought of self-control; then she suddenly sat erect in her chair and firmly mastered her quivering nerves.

The desire of the night before, when she had found herself alone in her room and the struggle over, came back with redoubled force. She carefully locked her door, to prevent Mrs Bird from bursting in, and knelt down by the window with clasped hands and face upturned, but her prayer found no words, for she still sobbed, and now and again put up a finger to stop a tear running down her face. When she spoke at last it was only one broken sentence:

"I thank God—who never deserts us—"

Then she dropped her head down upon her folded arms in another burst of irrepressible emotion, her whole body shaking, and her eyes blinded with rushing tears.

A quarter of an hour later Phosie called over the banisters to Little Gus. She heard him whistling and talking to the dog.

"I want to speak to you very particularly, dear!" she said softly, when she had attracted his attention and he stood listening half-way up the stairs. "Will you come up—quietly, Gus."

He checked his whistle and obeyed. She beckoned him into her room. He stared blankly at her pale, serious face.

"Gus, I am going away from here to-day, and of course you'll go with me," said Phosie. "Don't look so troubled. I have made all the plans."

"Going away? What on earth for?" exclaimed Gus.

Phosie hastily, but clearly, explained Mr Revell's will. He was much quicker at grasping the situation than she had expected.

"But Jules would let us stop on!" he urged. "He wouldn't turn us out, Phosie. He's a good feller. He'd want us to stop."

"Dear Gus!" said Phosie, "please don't ask me to give you all my reasons for going away so quickly. It isn't a foolish or a wilful desire. It is impossible for me to live here any longer. Should I say this so earnestly if I didn't mean it? You can trust me, can't you?"

"Of course I can," he replied, his eyes wandering from the empty bookshelf, which he had just noticed, to the things on the bed. "I suppose you mean it's inevitable, but what are we going to do, Phosie? How are we going to live? I'm not afraid of work, but I dunno what I can do, without learning something."

"We are going to Miss Sapio's first of all," she answered. "She has promised to get me an engagement on the stage, as soon as I can act the little sketch Mr Addison has written. I shall earn plenty of money."

"What about me?" asked Little Gus, anxiously.

The question was puzzling. Phosie shelved it.

"Oh, you'll get on all right," she said. "Now, I want you to go downstairs and put your clothes together. You had better have breakfast. Tell Mrs Bird my head aches, and ask her to bring me a cup of tea. I don't want anything to eat—well, perhaps I'd better have something—just a piece of bread and butter. If you see Jules—"

She paused in frowning thought for a few seconds, then continued:

"If you see Jules say I don't feel very bright this morning, but I shall be down soon. You need not tell him that we are going away."

Little Gus departed with a heavy step, feeling very mystified and miserable. It did not enter his head to question Phosie's wisdom in going away so suddenly, but he had been too comfortable and happy at The Stroll to think of leaving it without a pang. He wished feebly that Mr Revell were alive, or had left all his possessions to Phosie.

"If I was a millionaire," thought Little Gus, "I'd

leave her every penny when I died. No, I wouldn't wait to be dead. I'd give her every penny while I was alive. I'd give her every ha'penny!"

Somewhat cheered by the thought of his generosity, Gus managed to eat a good breakfast. It was nine o'clock before Phosie left her room. At the sound of her step Jules bounded up the stairs from the breakfast-room, meeting her in the hall. She was dressed to go out.

He began to speak as he approached, too quickly, nervously.

"Good morning, Phosie! I thought you were never coming down. Where are you off to so early? Going to market, eh? Why don't you send the Birdie?"

Phosie did not even glance at him, but she knew without turning her head how he looked—smiling, fresh-coloured, with his full lips, and liquid, brown, animal eyes. She answered in an expressionless voice, as if she were repeating a hardly-learned lesson.

"I am going to buy a trunk to pack our things—mine and Gus's. We are leaving here this morning. You need not feel any anxiety on my account. I am going to my friend, Miss Sapio."

"Going away? My dear child!" cried Jules, in amazement, and he moved nearer, laying his hand on the door. "What ridiculous ideas have you got in your little head now? You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I am going away," was all she answered.

"But I can't allow this!" said Jules, half in earnest, half in joke. "It's too absurd. Phosie darling, be reasonable! Let's talk it over. I wouldn't coerce you for the world. You know that, don't you? Come now, Phosie! Don't be unkind. Don't be hard. What a change in the little girl! What's the matter, dear?"

He stooped a little, trying to hide his surprise and anxiety, but the look he met was so determined and so appealing in its pale intensity that he drew back, and his restraining hand dropped from the door. She opened

it without a word. A rush of east wind swept into the hall, and he was alone.

Then Jules gave way to one of his rare fits of emotional passion. He flung himself into his room, swore, bit his nails, stormed up and down, up and down, like a wild beast in a cage. He had turned the key in the lock, but there was no danger of interruption from Gus or the frightened woman downstairs. They only listened to his tramp, tramp, and talked about him in whispers.

They would have been horrified to see him as he saw himself in the glass—the eyes bloodshot and swollen, the ugly purple vein looking as if it would burst between them, the usually smooth hair torn down over the forehead, the nostrils and mouth quivering. He was like a man who had been flogged, swept with impotent rage and self-pity.

No one in the world had ever seen Jules Revell in such a paroxysm. He guarded the secret of his weakness, as it was natural he should, thinking of it afterwards with surprise and shame.

When Phosie returned, an hour later, she found Mrs Bird and Gus waiting for her. They told her that Jules was in the breakfast-room, and he wanted to speak to her. There was something important he had to say.

A quick walk in the fresh air had restored the usual colour to her face and made her feel strong and vigorous. She was absolutely certain of a welcome and good advice from Miss Sapio, and the difficulty of finding rooms, which had baffled her at fifteen, only gave her a sense of amused responsibility.

How she would have enjoyed describing her plans to Mr Revell! Even Lily Parlow, after a hasty interview, confessed that the prospects were not displeasing. At first she had been shocked at her friend's conduct. For any girl to leave a comfortable house, unless bound for Gretna Green, or its modern equivalent, a registry office, struck Miss Parlow as extremely imprudent.

Phosie finished packing, exchanged affectionate farewells with Mrs Bird, and sent Little Gus for a cab. Then she obeyed Jules's summons.

He was sitting in front of the fire, but it had gone out. His hands were in his pockets, his head sunk on his breast.

"I am here. What do you want to say to me?" said Euphrosyne, standing just within the door.

He did not look round. She could hardly hear his low, surly voice.

"You needn't have run away in such a hurry this morning. I didn't tell you the truth yesterday about my uncle's will. He has left you a small annuity. You had better write to the lawyers, Faraday & Boyton. You know their address. I'm not a thief. I don't want to cheat you out of your money, even if I could."

"Why did you lie to me last night about this?" said Phosie, surprised, pleased and agitated by this news.

Jules got up and put one knee on the seat of his chair, leaning over it, looking at her.

"Why did I lie? Oh, you can guess. I wanted you to feel dependent—wretched—living on my bounty. All's fair in love!"

He continued looking at her, and she at him, in silence for a minute. Then he spoke again.

"Are you really going away?"

"Yes."

He turned his head on one side, avoiding her eyes, while he asked the next question.

"What is your reason? I think you ought to tell me. I promised my uncle to look after you."

"Ah, Jules!"

He ignored her interruption, and went on in the same voice of low, sullen protest.

"My uncle talked to me on the subject. He trusted me. He was not suspicious and hard, as you are."

"That's enough!" exclaimed Phosie. "I don't

want to hear you speak of Mr Revell. Is there anything else you have to say?"

"You know that I love you, Phosie! You know what I want. Darling!"

For one minute she saw the man of the night before—tender, passionate, dangerous—but he no longer had any power to move her.

She was not angry or embarrassed. She was simply aloof, unattainable, self-possessed. He read his answer in her face.

Little Gus called her from the hall, and she turned to go.

"Am I not to see you any more?" said Jules.

"No."

"Or write to you?"

"No."

"Well—!"

He shrugged his shoulders, pondered, and waited for her to speak the last words.

"Good-bye, Jules! Try to be happy—try not to blame me—it isn't my fault—"

"Oh, if you knew how I love you, Phosie! If you knew how a man can love. But women don't know. Have it your own way. Go if you want to, but don't think you can get rid of me so easily."

That was all she could hear him say. His voice trailed into silence, and he threw himself again into his chair, staring at the dead fire.

As the cab turned out of the quiet Stroll into the busy traffic of Hammersmith Broadway, Phosie leaned out of the window and kissed her hand.

"Can you see Mrs Bird or Lily Parlow?" asked Little Gus.

"No, they have disappeared," she answered. "I am just saying good-bye to the dear old Stroll. If Mr Revell were there I couldn't have gone away, but as it is—"

She clapped her hands together and, to her com-

panion's great surprise, threw her arms round his neck, nearly choking him.

"There's a soul-satisfying hug for you, Augustus Stewart-Cromwell," she said. "It's in honour of our escape, my dear."

"I dunno what you mean," said the startled Gus. "There never was another girl like you, Phosie! When I came upstairs this morning you were quite pale and black under your eyes. You looked as if you'd seen a ghost, but now! What are you laughing about?"

"Because we're running away again, Augustus—because the sun is shining—because I'm young—I don't know—every reason in the world."

"I liked The Stroll," said Gus. "We were very jolly there, you know, Taffy and you and me. I dunno whether we shall ever be so jolly again."

"Oh, yes, we shall," cried the girl. "But we'll never forget the dear old Stroll—never, never!"

CHAPTER XVI

A FINAL REHEARSAL

MISS SAPIO'S little drawing-room was turned into the stage of a private theatre.

The rugs were rolled into a heap outside the door. The piano was pushed against the windows and surrounded by chairs, stools and ornaments. All the electric lights were turned on, and the members of the audience were packed together as closely as possible in one corner of the room.

It was the final rehearsal of the pantomimic sketch which Hewett Addison had written for Euphrosyne.

Miss Sapio, most energetic of amateur agents, had been fortunate enough to obtain a trial performance—trial turn as it is called—at one of the principal West End music-halls, and this rehearsal was taking place a couple of days before that eventful day.

The composer of the music, a shy, talented young man in spectacles, sat at the piano to accompany, looking for directions to his friend Addison. Little Gus, Miss Sapio and Mr Quizzical Quilter were all squeezed together on a small sofa.

Standing behind them, mildly annoyed at this unexpected disarrangement of the usually comfortable room, stood Walter Race, the handsome young man who had got into the habit of wasting so much of his time in Miss Sapio's house.

Having been spending Christmas at a country house, he had not met Phosie or Little Gus during the two months which had elapsed since they left The Stroll.

It must be confessed that Gus, to whom he had just been introduced, was not in a condition to make a very good impression, having a very bad cold in his head, and wearing, plainly visible above his collar, a red flannel bandage round his throat. Walter Race wondered how such a mean-looking, unattractive little fellow came to possess the name of Stewart-Cromwell. He imagined, although no one had actually said so, that the dancer was Gus's sister, and that belief did not increase his anxiety to see her.

Miss Sapio, wearing one of her amazingly brilliant tea-gowns, had an arm locked in Gus's and the other in Mr Quilter's, perhaps to keep them from slipping off the little sofa. Hewett looked grave, but unusually well pleased with himself, for the playlet satisfied him.

Quizzy, puffing a cigar, enlivened the proceedings and jocosely remarks addressed to an imaginary orchestra, with an occasional ear-splitting whistle supposed to come from the gallery.

"I suppose we're all ready to begin, Hughie?" said Miss Sapio.

"'Ear! 'ear! Ring up, my boy!" put in Mr Quilter.

"Then perhaps you'll play the overture, Talling?" said Hewett to the composer.

"Clear, please!" shouted Quizzy, in imitation of a stage manager before the curtain rises. "Progrums, one penny each! Refreshments, gentlemen? Nice, cool glass o' beer—book o' the words!"

"Order! Order!" said Miss Sapio, playfully threatening to push her neighbour off the end of the sofa.

"Beg your puddin'! Mum's the word!" said Quizzy.

The composer ran his strong, sensitive fingers over the keys before he began. The little overture was melodious and haunting. Miss Sapio smiled approval at Addison, and Race enjoyed himself for the first time

since he entered the house that afternoon. Quizzy closed his eyes and beat time with one hand, wagging his head from side to side.

As the composer struck the last cord Addison clapped his hands and Euphrosyne entered.

The scheme of the sketch was as light as thistledown, for it dealt with the adventures of a banished fairy, alone by moonlight in the garden of a mortal.

All the stage accessories were necessarily absent—the moon, the owl, the bat, the flowers—but Addison had described them before she began, and the fairy herself was a fairy in mufti, half a fairy and half a girl.

Her grass-green frock was of silk chiffon, a sparkling girdle clasped her supple waist, her little satin shoes were tied round the ankles with silver cord, her wreath of flowers had not been sent home from the costumier's, and her hair, instead of floating free, was closely twisted into a thick plait.

Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, and her eyes sought Addison as she tripped into the room. Talling played an alluring waltz, and Phosie, with outspread arms, danced her first dance with exact and finished skill on the tips of her toes.

Addison was rewarded for the hours he had spent in teaching her, but he realized that the charm in all she did depended on her own personality. The idea, the steps, the gestures were his, but the peculiar joyousness of her beauty—an evasive, expressive beauty not only in face, but in figure—turned his little sketch into a masterpiece.

Fleet was the word to describe her. She moved as quickly as a bird skimming over water, as lightly as a leaf blown before the wind, as gaily as a bubble floating on the air.

Addison's smile broadened, and Miss Sapio gave vent to spasmodic bursts of applause, while Quizzy and Gus

seemed to be fascinated by the dancer's little feet, on which they kept their eyes fixed.

Walter Race, stooping forward, watched her with absolute delight. He was not the man ever to forget himself in his surroundings, but Phosie's dance affected him in a most strange and unexpected way.

He was bewitched, and the habit of mind that made him critical of everything he saw or heard gave place to the admiration of a boy, intense and absorbing.

He could have looked at her for hours. The effect upon him was that of a dream which comes to a man when he is only half asleep, held and controlled by semi-conscious effort, but embodying at the same time a fancy too delicate and bright for awakened reason. Beautiful ideas of his youth, long hidden in the darkness of the common days, flashed before him. He re-lived many hours in a few minutes, and they were the hours of lost illusions, when the world was lovely and love was in the world.

The dance ended, and Walter's dream was over. He saw Euphrosyne for what she was—a pretty girl, an amazingly pretty girl, with a laugh which seemed to echo some forgotten laugh of his childhood. No! Not a laugh at all, but the ripple of a foamy stream where he had played with his brothers, or the lilt of an old song without words, or a magic chime ringing in the harebells.

Walter smiled and pulled himself together. Away with such silly thoughts! He heartily joined in the loud applause, led by Quizzy, who shouted "Bravo!" in a voice which raised the roof.

Euphrosyne was enfolded in one of Miss Sapio's smothering embraces, and emerged with ruffled hair. Addison shook hands, and Walter, without waiting for an introduction, did the same.

She looked up into his face, and Walter, with a sudden impulse, pressed her hand fervently in his. Oh, she was

delicious! He thought she was a nymph, a Dresden china shepherdess! Were there ever such sweet lips and sparkling eyes? He felt as if he wanted to get her away from all these coarse people—just wrap her up in tissue paper and carry her home in his pocket.

Mr Quizzical Quilter, not to be outdone in gallantry by the younger men, knelt on one knee and kissed Phosie's hand, to which she submitted with a good grace, afterwards assisting the old gentleman to get up again.

"I think we shall make a hit," said Addison.

"Oh, I'm dead certain of it, Hughie!" cried Miss Sapio.

"Quite right, my dear!" agreed Quizzy, solemnly. "You can take the word of an old 'pro,' you've got a winner."

Little Gus's pleasure was expressed in murmurs and laudable attempts to suppress his sniffing.

Walter did not join in the animated talk which followed, but Phosie was none the less aware of the fact that he was looking at her. Directly there was an opportunity she spoke to him. He thought her frank, friendly little act of boldness the most captivating thing in the world.

"We have seen each other before," she said, nodding wisely.

"Impossible!" he replied. "I should never have forgotten you."

"You were in a hansom, delayed by a block in the traffic at Piccadilly Circus. I was on the edge of the pavement with two friends," said Phosie, decisively. "Your cab nearly ran over me. I jumped backwards laughing, and you heard me. Don't you remember now?"

"Of course I do!" he exclaimed. "It was last autumn. Of course I remember all about it. I had been walking across Regent's Park with a man named Wainwright."

"What's become of Wainwright?" put in Addison, catching the name. "I haven't seen him for a century."

"He is stopping at my brother's place in Suffolk," answered Race. "I got him a commission to paint my brother and his wife. Poor old Wainwright! He has to work too hard. Do you know Mrs W.?"

"I have never met her," said Addison.

"A most undecorative lady," continued Race. "Of course other men's marriages are generally mysteries, but I would defy anybody to solve Wainwright's."

"What's the woman like?" asked Miss Sapio.

"Wainwright's mother!" said Race. "I don't mean in appearance, for I believe his mother is only of normal plainness, but in age. The kind of person whose sentiments do equal credit to her head and her heart. I think she married Wainwright when he was very young and has slaved for him ever since. He is apparently devoted to her. I never pretend to understand an artist—you think I'm ill-natured?"

His speech ended in this abrupt question to Phosie. He had suddenly met her eyes fixed on his face.

"Perhaps, a little," she replied diffidently. "But of course this lady is not a friend of yours. One doesn't speak like that about one's friends."

She stopped and blushed. What right had she to criticise, for a moment, anything he said? It was good of him to notice her at all. Race made a little bow. She had unintentionally given him the snub he deserved, for Mrs Wainwright had proved herself his friend by years of generous hospitality.

It amused him to see how attentively Phosie listened to her friend, Miss Sapio's, instructions. Was she very simple, he wondered, or very deep? The desire to get her to himself, to talk to her and hear her laugh, grew stronger every minute.

His first admiration changed to curiosity. He was like a boy who had watched a clever mechanical toy set

to work, and was longing to handle it and find out how it was made.

At Miss Sapio's suggestion the young men re-arranged the drawing-room, and then she rang for tea. Hewett Addison made up the fire, and they all drew their chairs close, Phosie sitting on a low stool beside their hostess.

Walter Race lounged on the sofa, in shadow, where he could look at her unobserved. Little Gus, who never talked to strangers, perched himself uncomfortably on the music-stool, now and again slipping his elbow down on the keys, to the great annoyance of Talling, the composer.

"You must excuse me joining in the cup that cheers without inebriating, Flo," said Quizzy. "I find that tea upsets my nerves—never touch it by doctor's orders—over the left!"

So he took whisky-and-soda instead.

Addison and Miss Sapio were the principal talkers, Phosie putting in a word here and there, and always ready with her laugh of appreciation at the smallest of jokes. Walter thought she was a clever little flatterer, for he did not believe her simple pleasure could be genuine.

The flickering, red glow of the fire lent a peculiar charm to her face and figure. It made them both indefinite. It was like a tantalising veil wrapped round a fairy, now displaying, now concealing, the lines of beauty lost in shadow.

One of her feet was thrust forward to the fender, and, as she still wore her heelless dancing shoes, Walter could see what a pretty foot it was; the foot of a dancer, strong, springy, well-shaped. A foolish desire, impossible to gratify, came into his mind. He wanted to lay his hand upon the ground, palm upwards, and ask the girl to rest her foot upon it, just to see whether his long fingers would meet above the high instep.

He smiled at his own absurdity. No doubt such an

idea would shock her primness—no! that was equally absurd. There was no primness about Phosie.

He had not been so bewitched with a girl since—Rosalind?—Lucy?—for the life of him Walter could not remember which was the last of his lights-o'-love.

When Addison at last left off drinking tea and Little Gus had devoured all the macaroons, Phosie rose from her low seat and said she must go home. Miss Sapio did not ask her to stop to dinner. In fact, she did not invite any of her visitors to delay their departure, except Addison, and her invitation to him was conveyed in a lift of the eyebrows and a questioning smile. He accepted with a grave nod.

Phosie went upstairs to change her shoes. The men were left alone for a minute.

"What do you say to my discovery?" asked Addison, leaning his back against the mantelpiece and looking curiously at Walter and the old clown.

"Sweet, my boy!" exclaimed Quizzy, positively hissing the word. "Sweet! Prettiest little bit o' frock I've seen for years. Little bit of all right! Talk about ankles! They look as if you could snap 'em between your finger and thumb. Talk about eyelashes! If once a man got tangled up in 'em he'd never want to get out again. Talk about—"

"She's charming, Hughie," interrupted Race, who felt sure that Mr Quilter's compliments would sooner or later give him offence. "I congratulate you. Your sketch is a gem."

"The setting for a gem, you mean," said Addison.

"Where does she come from?" asked Race, ignoring the ruffled Quizzy. "How did you get to know her?"

"She's an old friend of Flo's," replied Addison, "an orphan girl, living all by herself in rooms—at least, not quite by herself, for she seems to have adopted that fellow who has just gone downstairs. I don't quite

understand the situation. She treats him like a brother, but they are not related."

"Is he quite right?" asked Walter, tapping his forehead.

"Oh, I think so," said Addison. "Something of a simpleton, you know, but a very good-tempered, harmless simpleton."

At that minute Miss Sapio and Phosie returned. The girl was simply, even poorly, dressed, with a bunch of red berries in her small black hat and a bright red worsted muffler round her neck. They were the only touches of colour she could afford to brighten the sombre look of her serviceable clothes.

The whole party went down into the slip of a hall. Miss Sapio, according to custom, kissed Phosie many times and implored her not to think about being nervous at the coming *début*. Addison gave her the same advice in less florid language.

"I'm going to hoof it towards my club," announced Quizzy, having struggled into an ulster of huge checks, put on his hat before the mirror in the hat-stand, and lighted his cigar. "Anybody who wants the pleasure of my company is welcome to have it. Don't all speak at once."

Phosie intimated that she and Gus were going in the opposite direction, and Race did not say anything, so Talling, the composer, found himself walking down the street beside the atrocious check ulster. His friends looked after him with smiling faces.

"You could play checkers on dear old Quizzy's back," observed Miss Sapio.

"Talling makes himself a martyr to civility," said Walter Race.

He followed Phosie and Gus down the steps, turned to lift his hat to Miss Sapio, and coolly walked away beside the girl.

There was a minute's silence.

"Shall we walk home, Gus?" she said suddenly, turning her face from the too eager gaze bent upon it from her other side.

"I dunno," said Gus, with his usual vagueness. "Just as you like."

"Don't you think it is a very long way to walk?" said Walter Race, gravely.

She did not fall into his little trap, but looked up at him with laughing eyes.

"How do you know it is a long way, Mr Race?"

He tried not to laugh. Little Gus, unconscious of his ignorance, enlightened him.

"We live at No. 5 Belton Terrace, turning off Park Road, it's handy to everywhere and you can't miss it if you follow the Baker Street 'buses," he said, repeating their landlady's formula.

"Well, Belton Terrace is too far for you to walk, I'm sure," said Race, promptly, to the girl. "Let us get a cab."

"Oh, no, we'll go by this," said Phosie, decisively, signalling as she spoke to the driver of a passing omnibus.

"Outside only!" cried the conductor, beckoning them forward.

They climbed aloft. Phosie twisted her muffler more warmly round her neck and told Gus to put up his collar. Race sat behind them, and, leaning forward with his arms folded on the back of their seat, he was close to the glowing cheek of the girl, and could see that her dark eyelashes were long enough to curve upward like the petals of a tiny flower. He recollected Quizzy's foolish words: "If once a man got tangled up in them he'd never want to get out again."

They chattered gaily about her dance—Miss Sapio's kindness—Talling's music—London crowds—Christmas—Walter hardly knew what was said. He paid as little attention to her words as to his own, for he felt instinct-

ively that Phosie shared the subtle delight of the fleeting minutes.

It was little Gus, the only member of the party who seemed aware of the cutting wind and passing of time, who stopped the omnibus at Belton Terrace.

"Are we there already?" exclaimed the girl, ingenuously, as she rose to her feet.

"Alas! So soon!" said Race.

Belton Terrace was a narrow, rather sombre street. It looked very mean and poor to the young man, to whom the word London conveyed the idea of the principal roads in the West End. Phosie glanced at him, guessing his thoughts.

"I'm afraid Belton Terrace has seen its best days," she said with a smile. "Perhaps you would rather not venture as far as No. 5?"

"On the contrary, I long to discover No. 5," said Race, smiling too.

The street was deserted, except for the solitary figure of a melancholy man with a bell in his hand, which he tinkled feebly as he walked along, occasionally stopping to look up at the windows of the houses. On his head he carried a tray, covered with a bit of green baize.

"That is our muffin man," said Phosie, in reply to Walter's question about the tinkling bell. "Surely you have seen a muffin man before to-day?"

"No, I don't believe I have," said Race. "Does he spend his whole life ringing a bell and trying to sell his wares?"

"Only in the winter," she replied. "I expect he makes the muffins during the summer and keeps them stored up. They're always very delicious, but rather leathery. Here's the key, Gus dear. Mr Race, will you come in?"

Walter accepted the invitation as frankly as it was given. He had made up his mind to go in, but hardly dared to hope it could be managed so easily.

No. 5 was a particularly dull little house, with long lace curtains hanging limply at the windows, a milk-can on the top step, and two cats engaged in the first stages of a lengthy dispute in the area.

"It is only right to inform our distinguished visitor that this is not our individual milk-can," said Phosie, seriously. "Also, those are not our cats. Our apartments—a most elegant suite, as you will see—are on the top floor, and we have nothing to do with the other lodgers. We look down on them figuratively, and they look down on us literally. Mr Race will understand these social distinctions have to be preserved if he has any experience of lodgings. But perhaps his area is all his own and he is undisputed lord of his milk-cans and his cats."

"You ridiculous girl!" exclaimed Walter.

Gus, after much fumbling, opened the door and closed it again behind him. The passage was close and dark, the only furniture being a very dusty, lop-sided umbrella and hat-stand, and a dead fern in a blue pot.

"Run upstairs and light the gas, will you, Gus?" said the girl. "Keep against the wall as you ascend to the elegant suite, Mr Race, the stairs in these stately homes of England being dangerous at the corners."

Gus obeyed Phosie and disappeared into the darkness above, slowly followed by the other two.

Walter Race abominated bad air, and, to add to his momentary disgust, he stumbled over a frayed mat at the top of the first flight, rapping his shin bone smartly against the banisters.

"Oh, have you hurt yourself?" cried Phosie. "I'm so sorry."

She stopped and put out her hand impulsively.

"Let me guide you!" she said.

Walter reached up and took her hand. He felt how strong and warm it was through the woollen glove.

Phosie laughed aloud, thrilled by his touch and

childishly amused by the need of groping their way. It was music in his ears. The prettiest laugh in the world.

He held her hand in a close grasp and followed her lightly and merrily up the stairs.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ILLUSIVE HOUR

EUPHROSYNE, during the two months which had elapsed since her flight from The Stroll, had had time to put her house in order.

An early application to Messrs Faraday & Boyton, Mr Revell's lawyers, had revealed the truth about her late guardian's will. He had left her a small annuity. Mr Faraday considered it very small indeed, ridiculously small, but the penniless child of a poor acrobat looked upon fifteen shillings a week as an almost princely income.

Little Gus's name did not appear in the will, for Mr Revell had only tolerated the boy for her sake. Jules Revell was his heir.

Phosie had seen Jules several times, but not spoken to him. He had followed her in the street; she had seen him walking up and down Belton Terrace late at night; he had written to her half a dozen times.

She had returned his letters unopened, and stared at him blankly, with quiet, unflinching eyes, when he had tried to stop her, ignoring his outstretched hand.

She was not afraid of him, or even angry, but she could never again take his hand in friendship. She could never again trust his word.

She had been in his power and could forgive him for the impulse which would have wrecked her life, but not for the deliberate design—as she saw it now, looking back upon their days together—to corrupt her mind with a lying tongue.

Removed from his overmastering personality, given

time for searching thought, Phosie shuddered at the recollection of Jules Revell, but the quick instinct in judging the morality of men which all women possess in a greater or lesser degree, hide it and deceive themselves as they do, saved her from brooding over his conduct.

She had told him the truth. He was not good enough to mate with her. There was nothing more to be said. It was over.

When Walter Race entered the little sitting-room at the top of the house in Belton Terrace, he was greeted with the perfume of violets. A great bowl of them, a gift from Miss Sapio, stood in the centre of the table.

Dazzled for a few seconds by the flare of the gas after the dark staircase, he shaded his eyes with his hand, while Phosie, pulling off her gloves, knelt down on the hearthrug to light the fire.

"I'm so glad I laid it before I went out this morning," she said. "Now you will both reap the reward of my virtue."

She was right. In a very little while there was a fine crackling fire. Race, giving his hat and overcoat to Gus, looked smilingly round the room.

It was a small room with a low ceiling. The walls were painted light green, and the floor was stained; there were only two rugs; the four wooden chairs had been painted white, and were piled with cushions covered in green chintz; there were the books from Phosie's room in Mr Revell's house, and her framed photographs; a couple of huge golden vases—from Miss Sapio—stood on the mantelpiece, and the window was covered by a long green curtain.

An ancient sideboard, of the unsightly, cumbersome style that is called "handsome" by lodging-house keepers, was adorned with several plants in pots, and a great many sprigs of holly and mistletoe gave the room a festive appearance.

Little Gus, with the proud consciousness of having helped to paint the walls and enamel the furniture, thought it was simply gorgeous, worthy of the golden vases; Phosie was satisfied, but Walter Race was pained by its poverty.

His first impression of pretty simplicity in the leaping firelight was forgotten in a more deliberate scrutiny of the poor little rugs, the wooden chairs, and the cheap curtains. He thought of his chambers in Plantagenet Court, Savoy, heated, furnished, decorated in the most approved modern style, and wondered what impression they would make on Phosie. He longed to try the experiment, but dreaded, at the same time, that she would lose her pretty self-possession in the surroundings of wealth and ease.

"Shall we have supper or shall we talk?" said the hostess, when Race was settled in one of the two arm-chairs by the fire, smoking the inevitable cigarette.

"Supper," voted Little Gus.

"I suppose we ought to call it dinner for your benefit, Mr Race," said Phosie, for the second time within half an hour reading his thoughts. "But Gus and I have our principal meal in the middle of the day, and if we called that luncheon we should be in the tragic position of never having a dinner at all."

Race did not answer. He was content to listen to her voice whatever she talked about, content to watch her lazily in silence.

He wished Little Gus at the other end of the earth. He was noisy, uncouth, clumsy, in the way.

The supper was very simple, but even Race's fastidiousness was satisfied with the way it was arranged. He was no glutton, with all his faults, and he ate Phosie's bread and honey and drank cocoa with as much enjoyment as if he had been dining at his club.

They drew their chairs round the fire for a dessert of oranges and nuts. Gus devoted himself to the work

in hand, leaving all the talk to Phosie and their guest.

She suddenly asked, to Race's surprise, whether he had a brother in Canada.

"Yes," he answered. "My brother Frank went out there to make his fortune some years ago. I don't think he has succeeded. We haven't heard from him for quite a long time, but he'll turn up one day—I know Frank."

"I can tell you what he has been doing," said she.

"Little witch!" exclaimed Race. "What do you mean?"

"The nephew of my old guardian, of whom I told you," continued Phosie, "is a man named Jules Revell. He had a little theatrical company in Canada, and your brother was a member of it. Jules showed me his photograph. You are very like him, are you not?"

"Yes, but Frank is bigger than I am, taller and heavier built, although he is some years younger," said Race. "You must have a wonderful memory, Miss Moore, to connect a man whom you had seen once in the street with the portrait of his brother whom you had never seen. It's simply astonishing."

"Is it?" said the girl. "Perhaps it was because I remembered your face so well. Your expression interested me. It was so bored and yet so keen. That sounds contradictory, doesn't it?"

"I think it is very true," said Race. "As a rule I am easily bored, but yet I take an interest in life. I look forward to a day when the interest will be greater than the boredom. Up to date it has been the other way about."

"Don't you enjoy your work, if you ever do any?" asked Phosie.

"I'm afraid I don't," he answered, smiling ruefully.

"Never enjoy your work?" cried Phosie.

"Never do any," said Walter.

She was frankly surprised out of her good manners.

"Whatever do you do with yourself all day long?"

He puckered his lips, and passed her the orange he had been carefully peeling.

"I don't know! Eat and drink and sleep."

"I think you must be laughing at me," said Phosie. "You can't waste all your time. Are you—are you—a politician?"

He laughed at the gravity with which she was evidently trying to fathom his idleness.

"No," he replied, "I don't care about politics, except when I'm stopping at my brother's house in Suffolk, and then we quarrel over politics all day long. John is a violent Tory. I'm the only Liberal in the family."

"From conviction?" said Phosie, hoping to make him serious.

"More from contradiction, I'm afraid," he answered. Phosie tried another tack.

"Have you any accomplishments?"

He meditated for a second.

"I can flirt," he answered gravely.

"Do you call that an accomplishment?"

"A most difficult one."

Phosie laughed.

"Then I suppose you would call falling in love a fine art?" she said with a twinkle.

"Certainly, for it means an eye for beauty, discrimination, and abandonment of self," said Race.

"Now, I think you're sincere—for once," said Phosie, still laughing.

"Of course I am. You have lighted on the one topic which absorbs me at the minute. It seems to be the only thing worth living for."

He dropped his voice and bent forward in his low chair, looking and speaking with an emotion which was

partly real, partly assumed, but wholly wonderful and sweet to the girl.

She studied his handsome face with thoughtful, melting eyes, only seeing what was good in it, herself moved to inexplicable tenderness, lost in the bewilderment and joy of her first, last love.

It was Walter Race who broke the long, eloquent silence.

"It is very good of you to let me come here. I see you are all alone in the world—practically all alone—and I appreciate the honour you do me. I am not unworthy of your trust and confidence."

"I know that. I believe it," she said.

He could not have explained the feeling that had prompted him to say these unexpected, serious words—perhaps it was the unconscious revelation in her eyes—but Phosie understood them.

Again they were silent.

Little Gus, with the nut-crackers dangling between his fingers, stared into the fire. He was in shadow and they thought he was asleep.

"Are you going to see me dance the day after tomorrow?" said Phosie, with a sudden change of tone.

Walter Race was grateful. Another minute and he might have forgotten that it was the first time he had seen the girl. What was the matter with him? It was all too delightfully foolish. He was roughly shaken out of gazing silence into commonplace speech.

"Can you doubt it?" he reproachfully answered her question. "Of course I shall be there. May I ask for you afterwards at the stage-door?"

"I am going to supper with Miss Sapio."

"Then so am I," said Walter, promptly. "But Miss Sapio doesn't know it yet. I must make the opportunity to invite her to invite me."

He looked at his watch. The hour was even later than he dreaded.

Phosie, glancing down, gave a start of surprise.

"Forgive me! I've stopped an unconscionable time!" he exclaimed, looking for his hat. "But it's your fault, you know."

"My fault?" she repeated, standing on tiptoe to help him on with his coat.

"Yes, you've bewitched me. From the minute I saw you dance in Miss Sapio's little drawing-room I became a new man."

"Nonsense," said Phosie, giving him her hand.

"It's the truth," said Race. "I only hope the effect will last. I'm afraid it will want renewing very soon."

"You can renew it the day after to-morrow," said Phosie.

"Much too long!" he exclaimed; then, after he had shaken hands with Gus and was standing at the door, "When? To-morrow? The morning—the afternoon?"

"No, the day after to-morrow," she repeated firmly.

"You're horribly cruel."

"I'm sensible."

"You're—no, I'd better not tell you! You will think I'm exaggerating."

Phosie went to the top of the stairs, lighting him down with a candle. He found his way by the banisters, stopping again and again to look up at her. Each time she waved her hand. When he had finally disappeared she still remained in the same position, listening, till the street door closed noisily behind him.

Then she returned to the sitting-room and cleared the supper-table, humming a tune softly to herself.

Gus was still sitting by the fire. When she had made everything tidy, Phosie laid her hand on his shoulder and gave him a little shake.

"What a sleepy old boy you are!" she said gaily "Good-night, dear. I'm going to bed."

Gus raised his head and looked at her. His small

red-rimmed eyes blinked. Her hand was still on his shoulder. He jerked his head towards the door.

"He's a fine-spoken feller," said Gus, meaning their departed guest. "He's a handsome feller. A gentleman, I suppose, born and bred? Well brought up, good fam'ly, all that sort of thing?"

"Yes," said Phosie.

"No wonder you've took to him," Gus went on. "I suppose you've took to him? You like him, Phosie?"

"Yes," she said again.

Gus returned to his old attitude, cheek on hand, looking at the fire.

"Don't sit up for me," he said. "Good-night, Phosie."

She went out of the room, still humming the gay little tune to herself, and shut the door.

"Of course she's took to him," muttered Gus. "It's very natural, but they only saw each other for the first time to-day. Only to-day! She and I—for years and years—I dunno—"

He sat alone by the dull hearth, for a long time, muttering to himself and staring into vacancy.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TRIAL TURN—AND AFTER

ALTHOUGH Miss Sapio's influence, aided by the growing reputation of the author of Euphrosyne's sketch, had obtained the trial turn, it was beyond their power to secure her an appearance in the good part of the programme.

The manager of the Paramount, for all his admiration of Miss Sapio, was too good a business man to run unnecessary risks with his audiences. He had seen Phosie's turn and thought it charming, but when he said to the stage manager, "Put it on early," there was no appeal from his decision.

Phosie had discovered another old friend in the second violin of the Paramount orchestra, none other than Mr Simmons, once of Airy Street. She had recognised him at the first rehearsal, squinting up at her out of the depths below the stage.

Their meeting was mutually cordial. Mr Simmons, directly he was at liberty, made his way to where she stood and shook her warmly by the hand.

"Have you given up composing and scoring music, Mr Simmons?" asked Phosie, wondering whether he had been quite so stout in the old days.

"Oh, no, my dear," said Mr Simmons, bringing his tractable eye to bear on her face, while the other explored the dim distance of the gallery. "But I felt I wanted a change, so I returned to my first love, the fiddle. I still carry on the old business in the daytime. How you've grown, Phosie! Seems a long time since we was

all so happy and cosy together in Airy Street, don't it?"

Slightly surprised at this agreeable description of the domestic life of Mr and Mrs Simmons, she agreed that it seemed a very long time indeed.

"Your poor father was a wonderful man in his own line," he went on. "But he wouldn't have made anything of a living nowadays. Contortion, pure and simple, has gone out. The public taste is improving. What they want now is a show with brains with it."

Phosie glanced at the turn in rehearsal at that minute—a revoltingly ugly man in dirty rags making pantomimic love to a lady who was balancing a champagne bottle on her chin—and asked Mr Simmons if that was really his opinion.

"Yes, my dear," he answered solemnly. "What the British public wants is brains, and I'm pleased to see that your little turn has got 'em."

"Then you think I shall succeed."

"Don't you be afraid about that," he said kindly. "You've got a good thing. I know what I'm talking about. I haven't been in the business for thirty years for nothing."

Phosie was not at all nervous, but her excitement steadily increased, like a fever in the blood, as the fateful hour drew near.

Little Gus, with the best intentions in the world, proved himself a very trying companion, for he worried her all day long to eat, to drink, to sleep; to do everything in short for which she was disinclined.

Miss Sapio, whose own performance would prevent her from being present, sent Phosie many final instructions by Hewett Addison, together with a large tin of a certain meat extract, in which she had faith, a cupful to be taken just before, and after, she appeared on the stage.

Addison was the girl's tower of strength; he was not

fussy, and she could not help wondering that such a quiet, whimsical, artistic man should be happy in the daily companionship of Miss Sapio.

Phosie admired and loved her friend, but she found it very difficult to understand Hewett's attitude, until it dawned upon her that, in spite of their intimacy, she herself knew very little of the playwright's real character. Such a man is not to be labelled, pigeon-holed and pulled out at intervals, after the manner of the dear, faithful, but uninteresting, ordinary friend.

He must be given much, for his own rare gifts are of priceless value; he never satisfies curiosity; he flies from the one who claims his confidence as a right; he possesses, and will accord, absolute freedom in thought as well as action. To realise these things is not the only way, but one of the best ways—should one happen to meet a genius—to win his affection. Miss Sapio was learning the lesson, but it was the hardest lesson of her life.

The Paramount by day was as different from the Paramount by night as Mr Simmons, tinkling at his old piano in his shirt sleeves, was different from Mr Simmons, washed and brushed, playing the violin in the orchestra.

The spacious entrance to the hall was ablaze with lights and gay-coloured posters. Big men, in chocolate and fawn livery, stood at the swing doors, while the attendance within the building was divided between powdered footmen and black-gowned, white-aproned programme girls.

The much-frequented bar was discreetly placed at the rear of the hall. A thick cord was stretched between the lounge and the stalls. When the performance began, at eight o'clock, only the cheap parts of the house, the upper circle and gallery, were filled.

Phosie's sketch was announced by a specially-printed slip inserted in the programme, Addison's name having saved her from appearing simply as "Extra Turn."

As Walter Race lounged into the Paramount, a few minutes past eight, he was amazed at the sight of row upon row of empty seats, forgetting that he himself, on all other occasions, never dreamed of entering a music-hall before nine o'clock. He glanced over his shoulder at the friend with whom he had been dining.

"Hard lines for the first turns," he observed.

'Devilish hard lines!' agreed the friend, his eyes fixed on a girl who was singing on the stage as he paid for his programme.

Race dropped into his seat and lighted a cigar. He was disappointed at the smallness of the audience for Phosie's sake, and pleasantly conscious of suppressed excitement.

He had not seen her since they parted at the top of the stairs in Belton Terrace. Forty-eight hours' absence had filled him with an almost painful longing to be with her again, for he had thought of her continually, and even dreamed of her at night.

Walter Race did not attempt to hide the truth from himself. He had fallen in love with this girl, but it was not yet the overwhelming, headstrong love he had experienced once or twice in his life.

He was still master of himself, and able to see the absurdity of his sudden infatuation. What did he know of Phosie? A social gulf yawned between them.

Ordinary friendship was out of the question—there was nothing of the hypocrite about Walter—and to tell her of his passion, to try to awaken her love in return, could only end in one way—marriage.

Yes, marriage! Little as he understood Phosie at this time, and little as he understood himself, there was never any doubt in his mind about that.

"Is this the turn you're interested in?" said Carl Stratton, passing him the slip out of the programme.

Stratton was a worn, thin man of Hebrew descent, with noticeably fine, restless dark eyes, and a small,

mobile mouth, hardly hidden at all by a black, pointed moustache. His thin hair, also black and glossy, was parted in the middle and slightly curled on his high temples. His nose was big and showed his race; he was deeply wrinkled, and his sallow skin, about the nostrils and under the eyes, looked unhealthy. The well-kept hand which he stretched out to Race was adorned with a heavy gold ring, the bezel beautifully chased.

Mr Stratton, to the casual observer, was a well-groomed, fashionably-dressed man of five-and-thirty, pleasant to see and pleasant to hear. A student of men, such as Hewett Addison, might have classed him as a crafty Jew, older than he looked, a rogue most cleverly disguised both by nature and by art.

"Yes, this is the turn I am interested in," answered Race.

"I'm sorry it isn't in the middle of the programme," said Carl Stratton. "Is the lady quite a novice?"

"I believe so, but I don't know much about her," said Race. "I have only met her once."

"I hope she will appeal to the gallery," said his companion, with a glance round the empty stalls.

"I'm afraid not," said Walter. "She seems to be a very artistic, dainty little person, the cameo type of beauty. I doubt whether it will be effective behind the footlights."

"The footlights certainly create and shatter illusion," said Stratton, vaguely. "But on the whole I think they are kind to beauty of any sort. I don't admire actresses myself."

"How can you talk of actresses in the lump?" said Walter, smiling. "Every actress is an individual woman, you know."

"Oh, yes, but I think they are all alike," rejoined his friend. "The only difference is in the place they hold in the profession—promising, passing, *passé*."

Race laughed absently and did not reply. The orchestra had started to play Talling's melodious, haunting overture to Phosie's turn.

His longing to see her was suddenly tinged with unreasonable jealousy. He was jealous of Stratton, of the rest of the audience, of the people on the stage. Then a foolish dread took possession of his mind. Would he be disappointed? Was she really as pretty, winning and light-hearted as he imagined?

The curtain rose on the dim, soft light of a garden beneath the moon.

Hewett Addison, standing in the wings, was satisfied with the stage effect, and Hewett was very hard to satisfy.

Mr Quizzical Quilter, puffing his cigar in the front row of the circle, started a faint, but encouraging, little burst of applause.

"Charmin'! Quite charmin'!" said Quizzy to the unknown gentlemen on either side of him.

Phosie appeared. Her bright brown hair rippled and curled to her waist, and she wore a wreath of great white blossoms. Her slender arms were outspread, and she hovered over the ground as lightly as a butterfly over a meadow.

The smile which had captivated Hewett Addison, when he first saw her dance in Miss Sapio's drawing-room, played about her mouth. She seemed to be possessed by happy thoughts, unconscious of the audience, dancing for sheer joy.

Walter Race, with hardly an effort, gave himself up to the delights of Fancy. The stage changed to a real garden with real flowers nodding in the night wind, a real owl blinking in the branches of a shady tree, a real bat flying past, and an ideal fairy lost in the wonder of a real world.

But Fancy is ever an illusive sprite. Suddenly he realised that she had flown. The stage was a stage

again; he recollected having seen similar mechanical effects in Christmas pantomimes; he was able to criticise the turn as a good turn, a pretty turn, but he doubted the success of it.

Phosie was delightful. There was no doubt about that, but he admired her more away from the footlights. He was feeling the inevitable reaction from his intense longing to see her again.

Was he in love after all? Walter hoped so. It was pleasant to be in love, up to a certain point. Yes, she was delightful. Of course he was in love!

"Quite a little beauty!" said Carl Stratton, tapping his hands together once or twice, without making any sound, as the curtain fell. "What do we have next?"

"Whatever it is I'm sick of the whole show!" exclaimed Walter.

Mr Stratton looked at him in mild surprise, little suspecting that his own indifference to Phosie's turn had occasioned this outburst.

"My dear Race, it has only just begun!" he said.

Walter recovered his temper.

"I only came in to see this new turn," he said hastily. "And I've promised to go to supper with some friends."

"As early as this?" asked his companion.

"Yes! Ridiculous, I know, but I'm afraid I can't get out of it."

He flung his coat over his arm and shook hands with his friend.

"You needn't hurry for a few minutes," said Stratton, quietly. "She has to change her dress. You'll only be kept waiting at a draughty stage-door."

"Why, what do you mean, Carl?" asked Walter Race, smiling in spite of himself.

"I suppose you're going to hunt for the lost fairy, are you not?" asked Stratton.

Walter laughed outright.

"Good-night, Carl," was all he answered, and went away.

Mr Stratton turned his head to look after him, showing his white teeth in a wide smile of friendly farewell.

"What a waste of money to buy a stall for that!" he thought, and returned to his languid enjoyment of the entertainment.

Walter Race found his way to the stage-door, where he met Hewett Addison just coming out.

"Well, how do you think it went?" asked the playwright, whose imperturbable face expressed neither satisfaction nor disappointment.

"Very well on the whole," answered Race. "What did you think of it yourself? You're a better judge than I am."

"I've just seen Burnett," said Addison—Burnett was the manager of the Paramount. "He seems very pleased, and I think he'll book it. I've made an appointment to meet him to-morrow. Now I am going round to see Miss Sapio. She will be waiting anxiously for my report. I shall see you later. Miss Moore will be out directly."

Race pushed through the swing-door into a narrow passage, from which he could see, at the bottom of half a dozen steps, a strip of the stage.

He had never been behind the scenes of a theatre before, and even such a tiny glimpse was not without its interest. The stage-manager, with a shiny silk hat tilted to the back of his head, was talking seriously with a couple of men in Pierrot costumes, while a French artiste, with a wholly inadequate shawl thrown over her shoulders, held an animated discussion with a little Frenchman in evening dress, who held the lady's tiny slippers in one hand and grasped the chain of a performing dog in the other. This fox terrier was shaking all over, from nervousness or cold, and kept his eyes on his master's face. Race, who understood French and

caught some of Madame's phrases, thought that Monsieur was even more to be pitied than Monsieur's dog.

His observations were cut short by the voice of the door-keeper.

"Yes, sir?" said the door-keeper, leaning forward in his little office.

"Will you give my card to Miss Moore?" said Race.

The door-keeper, after the manner of his kind, read the card, looked at the gentleman with patronising curiosity, and whistled to a call-boy who happened to be within hearing.

"If you're going past No. 7, Jimmy, you can take his card to Miss Moore—she's that extra turn," he explained. "Tell her both the gentlemen are waiting. Stand back against the wall, please, sir, you're blocking up the gangway."

Walter did as he was asked, and found himself shoulder to shoulder with the gentleman whom he supposed, by the door-keeper's words, had already sent in a card to Phosie.

They naturally glanced at each other. Race saw a man much shorter than himself, heavy-featured, flushed, with bright, curious eyes and full, thick lips. He was not at all favourably impressed, and, with the coolness of his age and class, returned the fellow's stare with a vague expression of contemptuous indifference.

It was Jules Revell. Race did not look at him a second time, but it was characteristic of Jules to furtively study Walter, impressed by his ease of manner, his clothes, his evident superiority to his surroundings.

Phosie rose in Jules's estimation. He would have liked to see half a dozen such men hanging round the stage-door to see her come out, discussing her freely. In his eyes it would have enhanced her value.

When she appeared at last, half hidden behind a magnificent bouquet, both young men started forward.

Her eyes met Race's and a beautiful colour leapt into

her cheeks. For a second she was oblivious to everything else, but then she saw Jules. He pushed in front, beaming on her, hat in hand. Race took a step back and waited courteously. He did not listen to what they said.

"That is not my bouquet, Phosie!" exclaimed Jules. "Did you get the flowers I sent you? Where are they?"

"I can't accept them. I have left them in the dressing-room," she answered. "Will you never understand me?"

He began to reproach her in a hurried whisper—she was cruel, heartless, wicked! Phosie stopped him with an imperious gesture which suited her well.

"It is no good, Jules. I am very sorry, but it is no good. I wish you would try to keep out of my way. You only make yourself miserable."

She looked at him imploringly for a second, and then, as his eyes grew soft and eloquent, dropped her own and hurried past him.

"Are you going to Miss Sapio's house?" she said quickly to the other man.

Before he could answer she had pushed through the swing-door and was in the street. Race, amazed at her sudden energy, followed her at once, leaving Jules Revell alone in the passage.

If the door-keeper and the call-boy, who had witnessed the little scene, hoped to see him make a fool of himself they were disappointed. He only shrugged his shoulders and gave them a nod of good-night.

Anger and humiliation warned him to hold his tongue. For the minute he hated Phosie with all the bitterness of his heart.

She had forgotten him. Walter Race sat beside her in the cab, and the perfume of his flowers filled the air.

He praised her turn in extravagant terms. She laughed with pleasure and leaned her head back against the cushion.

"Are you tired?" he asked, anxiously, bending close.

"No, I am happy! Too happy!" she answered.

"Why? Tell me why?" he entreated.

With truth she could have answered "Because I am with you." But even Phosie, with all her frankness, would not say that.

"I have made a success," she said. "I have pleased Mr Addison and the manager of the Paramount. I shall be able to earn a good living for myself and Little Gus."

"Why are you so fond of that boy?" asked Race. "I can't understand it."

Phosie's bright eyes opened wide in surprise.

"We have been friends, brother and sister so long. People don't like Gus, for they don't know him as well as I do. Poor fellow!"

"He is so dull, so stupid!" urged Walter.

"Oh, no, he isn't. He can be very funny when we're all by ourselves. At least, he thinks I'm very funny, and perhaps I like that even better."

"Forgive me," said Walter. "I ought not to have spoken of your old friend like that, but I can't help seeing how utterly unworthy—"

To his surprise she laid her hand on his arm, her whole manner changed. She was serious, appealing.

"I want you to be generous to Gus, even in your thoughts," she said. "He has no friends and all his life has been unfortunate."

"Is he—is he—" began Race, and hesitated for a word. "Is he at all feeble-minded?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Phosie. "But he hasn't a good memory and he can't study. He always seems to me to be groping in the dark, longing to understand life, but unable to see his way, undeveloped, childish without the bright promise of a child."

She had forgotten her companion for a second, and

now she looked at him again and her gravity passed away. He had hardly noticed what she said, absorbed in studying her face.

"Why do you look at me so earnestly?" said Phosie.

No other girl could have asked that question, he thought, with such direct simplicity. For once in his life he could find no words to answer. His pulse quickened and he struggled with himself, knowing that his safety lay in silence. He could not speak to her at that minute without betraying his infatuation.

She was apparently unconscious of his confusion, and played the accompaniment to a little tune running in her head on the closed doors of the cab. She had taken off one glove and he noticed the curious ring of turquoise hearts. Phosie, accustomed to wearing it, did not suspect his pang of jealousy, but the tense silence which had fallen between them suddenly struck her as very amusing.

Miss Sapio had described Walter as "singularly fascinating," and she wondered whether all singularly fascinating young men glared at a girl without speaking for minutes at a stretch. She really could see no occasion for such solemnity.

The cab stopped and she gave a little gasp of relief. Walter instantly returned to his usual manner. She hardly touched his hand in stepping out, but their eyes met in a swift flash of mirthful understanding.

Gus, who had been in the upper circle at the Paramount, was waiting for them in the little drawing-room.

"Fine!" exclaimed Gus, squeezing Phosie's hand. "Fine!"

He could say no more, but he repeated "Fine!" at intervals during the evening.

It was over an hour before Miss Sapio, accompanied by Hewett Addison, returned from the theatre, but Race and Phosie chattered without ceasing the whole of the

time. Their talk was the lightest of the light and bewildered Gus. After a few weak attempts to join in, only to find himself several topics behind, he gave it up and passed the time in slow, solemn perusal of a comic paper.

Miss Sapio, when she reached home in a state of bubbling excitement, made Phosie describe every incident of the evening, having found Addison a poor reporter of interesting details.

Mr Quizzical Quilter, arriving when supper was in full swing, added greatly to the hilarity of the party. He admired Phosie more than ever, and expressed it, according to his usual habit with ladies, by expressive winks or grotesque grimaces whenever she looked in his direction.

Walter Race was inclined to resent, on the girl's account, these attentions, but Phosie flattered the old gentleman, and even liked him, out of sheer good-temper and friendliness to all men. She preferred Quizzy when he was sensible and told amusing little anecdotes about his grandchildren, but she always treated him with pretty consideration.

It was past midnight before Miss Sapio bade her guests good-night. She accompanied them to the hall door.

Hewett Addison, who lived at that time only a couple of streets away, offered to take Quizzy home, for that veteran, when he felt the cold night air, was seized with a violent fit of coughing and seemed to shrivel up in his big check ulster, as if he had been touched by the wand of a spiteful magician.

Little Gus echoed the cough. Phosie looked at him anxiously, and, by great good fortune, saw an empty cab meandering along in the distance. The young man whistled, the driver raised his whip in answering signal, and clattered down the road to the house.

Gus scrambled into the cab. Phosie put her foot upon

the step to follow him, when she felt the light touch of Race's hand on her arm, and she heard him say, quickly and softly:

"Will you walk?"

She looked at him in surprise, one foot still on the pavement.

It was a beautiful night, clear and starry.

Phosie answered his question with a little nod, and bent forward to speak to Gus, while Race told Miss Sapio of their intention.

Miss Sapio only laughed, quite content for her friends to be as unconventional as herself.

Phosie was embraced again, and Walter enjoined to take "jolly good care of her."

The cab rattled away. Addison and Quizzy slowly departed in the opposite direction. Miss Sapio went in, slamming the door behind her.

Euphrosyne and Walter were alone.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STARRY NIGHT

"THE whole world is asleep," said Walter Race.

"It is the hour of dreams!" said Phosie.

It is days and days since I saw you dancing in the theatre."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I hate to think of it."

"You were not pleased with my success?"

"On the contrary, I was delighted with your success. But it all seems hollow, useless, ugly compared with this! The flaming lights, the noise, the smoky air! I feel as if I had seen a bright bird beating its wings in a gaudy cage, or a fresh flower drooping in the fumes of gas. Now the bird is free and the flower blooms."

They had turned out of the street where Miss Sapio lived into a wider road, with a row of trees on either side, like great sentinels shaking their lofty spears of bare forked branches. The nipping air was still, and the heavens were strewn with stars.

All the beauty, all the mystery of night was wrapped about them.

"Do you know the air is full of dreams?" she asked, smiling up into his face.

He shook his head and drew her a little closer to his side.

"I can see them," said Phosie. "Beautiful, secret dreams. They swim on the waves of the wind, over us, beside us, and through us as we walk. Some of them

have travelled from far, far distant lands. Some of them are dreams of the past, like faded pictures in a haunted house. Some of them fly on airy wings, or march like soldiers with a steady tramp. Some of them are only bunches of flowers, or snatches of song, or the echoes of a well-remembered voice—”

She stopped abruptly, half-ashamed of her fanciful mood.

There was no sound but their own footsteps. He lifted her hand to his lips. It returned lightly, confidently, to the shelter of his arm.

“How long have we known each other?” he said.

“Three days,” said Phosie.

“No, no! It is three years—thirty years—since the world began,” he murmured.

“Then I must be very old,” said Phosie.

She drew her hand quickly from his arm, glanced over her shoulder to make sure they were alone, and began to dance down the street in front of him, while her laughter rang out like a peal of silver bells.

Walter, after one minute of surprise, leapt forward, caught her round the waist and joined in the dance.

They whirled into the middle of the road. It was hard and slippery beneath their feet, a perfect floor! Walter had danced at many balls, but never with such abandon. He held her for the first time in his arms, but she was so light and the swing of the waltz so rhythmical, that even the sense of touch seemed evanescent; she was so near, but so far, from his wildly-beating heart.

He looked into her eyes and a wave of her hair touched his cheek. She lifted her hand from his shoulder to push it behind her ear, and he felt as if she had half escaped—only the tips of her fingers in his, only his light clasp round her waist. Her hand returned, he swung her off her little feet, but she hardly noticed it. He could have danced for an hour in the vigour of his strength. He realised that he had never danced before.

It was Phosie who stopped, as suddenly as she had begun, made him a demure little curtsy, and returned to the pavement as calmly as if it were a general custom for young ladies and gentlemen to waltz down the middle of London roads together at two o'clock in the morning.

They walked on slowly, without saying a word about the dance, winding their way through a labyrinth of streets. The same gentle thought, after a while, occurred to them both.

"I think we are strolling over the meadows in mid-July," said Walter.

"I can feel the soft grass under my feet!" exclaimed Phosie.

"Tiny feet! Look how the daisies underneath them dip and rise again," he answered.

"Just now I trod on a piece of wild thyme, did you smell the sweet perfume?" she asked.

"Yes. Where did you gather the honeysuckle and meadowsweet? It makes a lovely wreath on your sunny hair."

"Do you think so? Here's a corn-flower for your buttonhole."

"Will you put it in for me?"

"No, that old shepherd driving his flock is staring at us."

There was silence while the old shepherd, who was wearing the uniform of a policeman, passed them by.

"Listen! Can you hear the skylarks and the wood-pigeons in that little copse of beeches and willows, Phosie?"

"Of course I can hear them."

Her tone of conviction broke the spell.

"I believe you can!" exclaimed Walter.

"But I have never lived in the country," she replied. "I'm a London sparrow, you know, chirping about on the roofs and in the gutters. I've never seen the sea, and I can never afford to go out of town."

"Dear little girl—poor little child—fairy—moon-beam!"

She raised her eyes at the sound of his caressing voice. He was looking at her with an expression she had never seen on his face before.

Her words had moved him to a new tenderness. He thought of her youth and simplicity, and he was suddenly glad to have her alone, not to flatter and influence her pliant nature, but to win her confidence, to deserve her sweet trust.

He forgot his joy in the dance. Wild as it had been, it was nothing to this minute of perfect sympathy. Their hands met, gently, freely, each was clasped in each. Their hearts were exalted in the starry night. The swift love of their youth was touched to fine issues.

Strains of unheard music stirred their inner sense of hearing. Soft colours gathered and dissolved to their inner sense of vision. The man's spirit broke the veil of an aimless life which hung about it like a lurid mist, and he was conscious of one of those strange, unfathomable waves of emotion, as fleeting as they are rare, in which the love of self—desire, passion—is merged in the greater love of the Infinite.

Illumination flashes into the soul, and it sees, in less time than a heart-beat, that the most tender human ties, the most inspired human work, the most glorious human victories, but reflect the attributes of the Creator of them all.

Walter Race, when this rare minute of spiritual light had flown as quickly as it came, looked at Euphrosyne with the half-admiring, half-amused earnestness which she already knew so well.

Having always flattered himself on a thorough knowledge of his own character, he was trying to solve the problem of her fascination.

He knew, having proved it a hundred times, that he was a man of self-control, not imprudent, scornful of

sentimentality, no longer swayed by boyish impulse, but yet—but yet—he intended to marry this girl. Marry her! Marry her for the sake of a charm which, he told himself, was probably half illusion, for the sake of a gay laugh, for the sake of a pretty face.

He wished he had never seen the little sparkling jewel, but having seen it, he was willing to pay any price to call it his own.

Such thoughts as these, but less definitely conceived, flitted through Walter's mind in the reaction from his minute of rapture.

He talked to Phosie as a lover talks, for his mind was made up and there was no need for concealment. Radiant words of a starry night! They would lose their lustre in repetition, but Phosie cherished them in her heart—never repeated, never forgotten—through all the changing years of her life.

She parted from him at the door of her house.

“Good-night—Walter.”

“Good-night, angel.”

He bent and kissed her hands again and again, held them for a second against his breast, and let her go. She softly turned the key in the lock, looked over her shoulder, and then the black door closed behind her.

Walter Race, seized with an impulse of divine madness he was never to know again, turned his back on the narrow streets and silent houses.

He could not go home. His walls would have seemed like a prison. Sleep was impossible. He had never felt so keen, so virile, so strong.

On and on he tramped, untired and untiring, until the night was fading into dawn. The stars went out, and the pale, silvery-pink light of a new day stole like a mist through the grey clouds in the east.

Walter stopped at last, looking towards the city, on a windy stretch of open country.

He felt like a man who had just awakened from a

vivid dream, but shudders to find himself a little cold, a little weary, lying on the bare ground.

“Euphrosyne!” he murmured, as if she were there to hear. “Euphrosyne, my heart!”

Then he smiled at himself with a shake of his big shoulders.

“Oh, Phosie!” he said, “what a fool a woman can make of a man—Phosie! Phosie!”

CHAPTER XX

PHOSIE IN LOVE

IF Walter Race thought that the course of his true love would run smooth he was disappointed, but not unpleasantly.

Phosie, under the stars, in the first enchantment of his society, was a very different Phosie on the following day.

She rose late, breakfasted with Little Gus, and met Hewett Addison by appointment after his interview with the manager of the Paramount.

When Mr Race asked for Miss Moore at No. 5 Belton Terrace, with the intention of taking her out to lunch, he was coolly informed she was not at home. Would he like to see Mr Stewart-Cromwell instead?

He had not the least desire in the world to see Little Gus, but he said it would be a great pleasure, and made his way to the top floor of the house.

The little sitting-room, with its gay chintz cushions and green painted wooden chairs, looked neat and fresh. Walter observed that the bouquet he had sent to Phosie had been carefully taken to pieces, the flowers unwired, and arranged in vases on the mantelpiece and side-board.

Mr Stewart-Cromwell, sipping a large glass of lemonade, was reading the newspaper by the fire. He greeted the visitor nervously, keeping his eyes fixed on Walter's boots, obviously ill at ease.

"I hope you'll excuse it. It's because of my cold

you see," said Gus. "Phosie made it for me before she went out."

Race, after a puzzled second, understood that he was apologizing for the glass of lemonade.

"I believe lemon is very good for the throat," he replied.

"Yes, it makes it meller, you see," said Gus.

"Do you know when Miss Moore will return?" asked Walter.

"I dunno. She won't be very late. She'll come home to her tea. She knows I shall expect her home to her tea."

Little Gus's eyes, knowing every button and line on the boots, wandered to his visitor's waistcoat. He wondered why Mr Race, evidently the possessor of wealth, did not go in for "fancy vests," and compared his clothes unfavourably with those of Mr Quizzical Quilter.

"I shall be in this part of the world at about four o'clock," said Walter, as if he had just remembered an important engagement. "Perhaps I could see Miss Moore for a few minutes then?"

"Perhaps you'd like to leave a message," said Gus.

"Will you give her these flowers, Mr Stewart-Cromwell, and say that I hope to call?"

Gus took the bunch of carnations, concealed in white paper, awkwardly enough, but the first smile Walter had seen came into his face.

"She'll be very much obliged to you, I'm sure," he said. "She isn't used to getting flowers like these from a shop. We always buy ours in the street. Phosie gets 'em from a poor woman she knows whose husband lost his leg in a gale on the Atlantic Ocean."

"Do you mean that his leg was blown off?" asked Walter, smiling.

"I dunno how it happened," said Gus, shaking his head doubtfully. "Phosie could tell you all about

it. She's made friends with 'em, and we have the children here to tea every Saturday, and play games. Phosie says she likes 'em."

"How kind she is! How generous!" exclaimed Walter.

Gus, running his eyes up the buttons of the waistcoat, gave him a curious glance.

"You don't know much about Phosie, do you?" he asked.

"Enough to appreciate and admire her!" was the quick retort.

"Ah!" said Little Gus.

There did not seem anything else to say, so Walter, after attempting a little conversation about the performance at the Paramount and the news in the morning paper, took his departure.

He was not angry with Phosie, for she had made no promise to be at home, but her absence had given him a shock of surprise.

After determining to forget all about her until it was time to return to Belton Terrace in the afternoon, he went to see Miss Sapio, quite expecting to find Miss Moore at her house. Again he was doomed to disappointment. Miss Sapio and her chow had gone out with a gentleman in a motor, and the servant did not expect her back before dinner.

The gentleman was not Mr Hewett Addison. Miss Moore had not called. Walter Race, annoyed with himself for his curiosity, was obliged to go to his chambers and spend his time in smoking, trying to read, and wondering whether Phosie and the playwright were lunching together.

Four o'clock found him at Belton Terrace. Phosie greeted him as if the starry night was so far in the past that she only remembered it faintly by an effort.

There was not a touch of sentiment, much less affection, betrayed in her manner. She absolutely refused

to be serious. If she had not looked so pretty, with one of his carnations in her hair, Walter would have been in despair.

He had expected to find her subdued, shy, grateful for his admiration and responsive to his moods. Her high spirits baffled him. He was unprepared for an encounter of wits, and failed to hold his own. He even compared himself unfavourably with Gus. Gus, for all his stupidity, seemed to please Phosie better.

She had good news to tell of the Paramount. Hewett Addison hoped to book a long engagement. The arrangements were still incomplete, but she was confident of his success.

After tea they sat round the fire, but there was no repetition of the soft speeches, the long, silent glances of the first evening Walter had spent in Belton Terrace.

Phosie kept her bright eyes fixed on her needlework, and suggested, with the sweetness of duplicity, that Little Gus should read aloud.

Now, if there was one thing more than another which Walter hated it was reading aloud. He was obliged to dissemble, but Phosie suspected the truth. A desire to test his patience, coupled with an even stronger desire to tease him beyond endurance, made her persist in her plan.

Little Gus was delighted. He was in the middle of a particularly long, instructive book of adventures. Phosie gravely sketched the outline of the story to Walter, assured him that Gus could read for hours at a stretch without fatigue, and demurely devoted herself to her work.

Mr Stewart-Cromwell was a slow, conscientious reader. Words which he could not pronounce, or failed to understand, he was in the habit of spelling several times under his breath, before dismissing them with a sigh of "I dunno what that means, but never mind."

Page after page was turned, chapter after chapter

dropped behind. Gus's voice, always feeble, grew into a sing-song of meaningless words. Walter had only one clear idea of the story, and that was not the truth, for he considered it the dullest work ever penned.

Phosie dared not lift her eyes. Occasionally she helped Gus over a difficulty, but always in a meek, low voice unlike her own. Of course she knew that Walter was looking at her, but his ardent gaze, now and again crossed by an impatience he found it hard to suppress, only added to her mischievous enjoyment of the situation.

Her guest sighed, changed his position, took out his watch, glared at Gus; but Phosie only stitched away, apparently absorbed in the uninteresting book.

Just after Walter had decided that Gus intended to go on reading all night he closed the volume and laid it on the table.

"My voice isn't as meller as I could wish," he said.

"But perhaps I can give you a bit more later on."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Walter.

"Is it really getting late?" said Phosie, dropping her work on her knee. "What is the time, Mr Race?"

He held up his watch for her to see.

"Impossible!" she cried. "How the time has flown, hasn't it? Must you really go at nine o'clock, Mr Race? Don't forget that important engagement."

Walter cursed the touch of temper which had made him invent an important engagement when Phosie had not given him as warm a welcome as he thought he deserved.

"I'll give it up," he said.

"Oh, I wouldn't allow you to do such a thing," she answered. "Gus dear, get Mr Race's coat, will you? We mustn't be so selfish as to detain him any longer."

Gus went out of the room, leaving them alone for a few seconds.

"You provoking little witch! What do you deserve?" said Walter.

She assumed an expression of innocent surprise.

"I haven't had a word with you, not a single satisfactory word, and now you're driving me away."

"I am not responsible for your previous engagements," said Phosie.

"I have no previous engagement!" he exclaimed in despair.

"Oh, Mr Race, that can't be true. It's very kind of you to offer to stop, but I couldn't think of accepting such a sacrifice."

"Don't be so tantalizing. Be serious for a minute," he pleaded.

"No, I can't," said Phosie. "I am much too happy and pleased with myself and you, and everybody else."

"Who would willingly be included in a universal embrace, shared by all?" said Walter. "Not I!"

"Why not wait till you are asked?" said Phosie, with a toss of her head.

Then Little Gus re-appeared with the coat, and he was obliged to go, fully determined not to call again for several weeks.

Before he reached his chambers in Plantagenet Court, however, the words "several days" were substituted for several weeks. If he was mistaken in the girl, if she were nothing more than a heartless coquette, the sooner he found it out the better.

On this account he wrote to Phosie before he slept that night, feeling that it was prudent to know the worst as quickly as possible, although he was obliged to acknowledge that if she failed him now all the pleasure and brightness, for the time being, would go out of his life.

Phosie answered the letter briefly. She was going to tea with Miss Sapio the day after to-morrow. Perhaps

he would be there? Of course he was there, but so were Hewett Addison and half a dozen other people.

There was no opportunity for private talk, and Walter, whose notions of teasing were founded on the recollection of horse-play with his brothers, did not understand the gentle, subtle methods of Euphrosyne.

He contrived to walk home with her, grateful for the absence of Little Gus. Her mood changed. She was sweet and conciliating, but when they reached Belton Terrace he was not invited to enter the house.

"Is Mr Stewart-Cromwell going to read to you all the evening?" asked Walter, on the step.

Phosie tried not to laugh, but failed. He shook his head at her reproachfully.

"Why do you delight in torturing me, Phosie?"

"I wouldn't hurt you for the world, dear, good, unreasonable Mr Race."

"Then dine with me to-night. Do! Why not? We'll go to the Nonpareil. It's my favourite place, and I'm sure you'll like it. Will you? Don't condemn me to a long night of misery. Be kind."

"Are you really miserable without me?" asked Phosie, ingenuously.

"Utterly. Unspeakably," he replied.

"That's a great pity, for you see we can't always—"

Phosie left her sentence unfinished, blushing at the words she had nearly spoken. He caught them up.

"We can't always be together? Is that what you were going to say? Is it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I've forgotten. Let me go!" she said.

"Must I wait for you in the street? Won't you let me come in?" asked Walter.

"But I haven't made up my mind whether I will accept your invitation," said Phosie, knitting her brows thoughtfully.

"I think you will."

"So do I. You may come in."

They dined together. The more he saw of Phosie the more she bewildered him. At times he was jubilant, when her melting eyes and gentleness seemed to respond to his love; but then again, at the very minute of triumph, she would elude his pursuit, laughing at his dismay and giving him, in a lesser degree, the impression she had given Jules Revell of her detachment, her power of standing aloof from her fellow-beings.

One afternoon, after three weeks of mingled happiness and despair, Walter Race persuaded Phosie to go for a drive with him to Richmond Park. He had made up his mind to challenge Fate. Suspense was unbearable. He was not the man to dally any longer with young love for all his dalliance with old Time.

Phosie, sitting beside him in the dogcart in her old black jacket with the red muffler round her neck, looked a very little girl indeed, flushed with the wind and evidently enjoying herself immensely.

It was a clear, frosty day. The Park, as they drove through the gates, looked bare and desolate, with its long stretches of faded grass and distant clusters of sombre trees.

Phosie put up her hand to hold her hat, for a sudden gust of wind had tried to snatch it away in passing. Turning sharply down a side road, where there was not a soul to be seen, Walter drew in his horse and turned to his companion.

They had been unusually silent all the afternoon, hardly exchanging a dozen words since driving out of Belton Terrace.

Her eyes were raised to his. The words he longed to speak changed to a commonplace question.

"Are you cold, Phosie?"

"No, not a bit."

"Let me wrap the rug more closely round you, dear. What a blustering wind!"

"I love the wind."

He put his whip in the socket, twisted the reins lightly round it, and was free to help her with both hands.

"Will the horse run away?" she asked.

"Oh, no, he'd stand for an hour," said Walter. "I don't think a woollen scarf is nearly thick enough for a day like this," he added. "You ought to wear furs. When are you going to let me give you some furs?"

"Silver fox or Russian sables?" asked Phosie.

"Whatever you like."

"I think I should prefer bunny skins, they are so very fashionable in Belton Terrace."

"I'm serious, Phosie."

"So am I."

"Then give me permission to buy you some furs."

"No, thank you."

"Oh, why not?"

She played with a brown leaf that had fallen on her shoulder from the branches overhead, smiling a little secret smile of happy thought.

"Shall I tell you the reason, honestly?" with a quick side-glance.

"Yes."

"Well, I don't want to spoil the days we have spent together with the reality of presents," she said. "Perhaps it will strike you as absurd, but it never gives me great pleasure to receive gifts from the people I really like. Not flowers!" with a touch to the violets he had given her that morning. "I am speaking of other things. However beautiful they are, or expensive, I should only value them for the kind thought which prompted the giving, and I know I shall have your kind thoughts, whatever happens, without any presents as an assurance."

"My kind thoughts!" he repeated. "You quaint little child! My kind thoughts!"

"Well?" said Phosie.

Walter Race, not with the rare emotion of the starry night, but with the tenderness and strength of a man whose heart is set on attainment, suddenly spoke the words he had made up his mind to speak. Irrevocable words!

Phosie listened in silence, looking at him askance, with the expression of a startled, captivated, shy creature of the woods. Her breath came quickly between her slightly parted lips. The wind blew her hair about her face, but she remained immovable, neither yielding nor shrinking away from the clasp of his arms.

"Speak to me!" he entreated. "Let me hear your voice, Phosie! No man ever loved as I love you. How beautiful you are! How perfect!"

Still she did not move. He bent closer.

"How perfect!" he said again. "Perfect eyes! Perfect lips! Angel! May I kiss you — Phosie — once—"

"Yes," said Phosie, softly.

"Do you love me? Do you love me?" he whispered.

She leaned against him with the first sigh he had ever heard her give.

"You will marry me, Phosie? You will? You will?"

"Yes."

Love laughs at locksmiths, and the wind laughs at love. At the very second when she answered him and he drew her hands round his neck, the branches over their heads rustled and dipped, withered leaves danced in the air, and Phosie's hat blew away.

Walter jumped out of his seat and gave chase. What a climax to his impassioned declaration! The absurdity of it did not strike him, and had he succeeded in capturing the hat at once it might have been possible to return to his seat and continue the scene as if nothing had happened.

But the sportive wind gave him no such opportunity, for the hat whirled merrily along the road, now stopping for a second, now going on again, as if it were attached to an invisible string twitched by mischievous fingers.

Phosie stood up in the dogcart, holding on to the back of the seat, and greeted his wild, ineffectual clutches with shrieks of laughter.

Walter, who was beginning to feel both savage and ridiculous, looked over his shoulder and joined in, rushed at the hat again fiercely, caught it up, and waved it over his head.

Phosie sat down again panting, her hand on her side.

"Do you know what I was wishing?" she asked as he came up.

"No, you foolish darling!"

"Oh, I did wish your own hat would blow away at the same time."

"That was very wicked of you!"

He sprang into the dogcart and brushed the dust from his capture with his handkerchief.

"I shall never forgive it," he said. "It spoilt our minute of ecstasy."

"Suppose we forget all that nonsense we were talking about," suggested Phosie, as she straightened the brim.

"No! No!" said Walter. "You and I are going to be married. It's settled. It's inevitable, as our friend Gus says. It's inevitable, isn't it, dearest? Tell me it is, just the way you told me before. Do, Phosie!"

But Phosie was not to be wooed back to gravity.

Walter was happy, for the time absolutely happy, but he had to be content with her changeful moods. She insisted on telling him all her faults, a list which did credit to her powers of invention, and made him take her back to Belton Terrace in time for tea with Little Gus.

There was no reading aloud that night, but Miss Lily Parlow had been invited to supper, and they played cards.

Walter Race, charmed with Phosie whatever she did, found it hard to believe that she had promised to marry him. She was much more affectionate to Gus, much more attentive to Lily Parlow.

She refused to read the entreaty in his eyes, and ignored the opportunities he made for the exchange of a private word or a touch of the hand.

She smiled at him, when the time came to part, as unconcernedly as if he were a mere stranger, and went out of the room with her friend, leaving Walter with Little Gus.

Gus lighted the visitors downstairs with a candle, Phosie leaning over the banisters to watch them go.

Walter had reached the bottom of the first flight when he heard her softly call his name. He turned and saw her beckoning.

"Wait for me, I shall be down in a minute," he said to Gus, and bounded up the stairs.

Phosie took a step to meet him. She put her hands on his shoulders, looking into his eyes.

All the mockery and mischief had passed out of her face.

"Dearest love!" she whispered, and drawing his head down she kissed his cheek and pressed her own against it.

CHAPTER XXI

MR AND MRS WALTER RACE

THE Nonpareil was crowded. So crowded, in fact, that an original patron, seeking for a quiet corner in which to eat one of the grilled steaks famous at the little restaurant, was moved to express his contempt for modern conditions to the head waiter.

"This used to be a quiet, decent place, but now it's a perfect bear garden," he said.

The head waiter, who knew the old patron—it was Wainwright, the well-known painter—shot his trained eyes over the heads of the seated diners.

"I think I can find you a corner, sir, if you'll follow me," he said, leading the way to a little table in the shelter of an alcove.

"This will do," said Wainwright, with a glance at the other occupant of the little table.

He sat down and ordered his grilled steak. The other man was peeling an orange, and Wainwright noticed his hands were long and bony, yellow-skinned and well-manicured, as different from his own square, strong, but soft hands as the man's wiry figure and restless dark eyes were different from Wainwright's breadth, solidity and quiet expression.

It was Mr Carl Stratton, the friend of Walter Race, who faced the artist. He also had patronised the Nonpareil before the days of its great popularity, but its evolution from a quiet little eating-house to a fashionable restaurant met with his unqualified approval.

The bustle and noise; the sound of talk and laughter

which drowned the efforts of the small string band in the distance; the number of ladies at the tables; the mingled perfumes of tobacco smoke, coffee and spicy dishes—all these things appealed to him, distracted his thoughts from his own affairs.

The artist, absorbed in his own reflections, had forgotten all about him, when a well-known voice, greeting them both, suddenly broke in upon his reverie.

"Carl Stratton and Tom Wainwright!" exclaimed the voice, "How are you both?"

It was Miss Sapio, who was taking a week's holiday from the cast of Hewett Addison's popular comedy.

Both of the men rose to their feet. Miss Sapio, who seemed to regard their happening to dine at the same table as the most extraordinary coincidence that had ever taken place, made them known to each other.

"Can you gentlemen make room for me?" she asked, sweeping her trailing draperies out of the way of the passing waiters. "I'm all on my little lonesome."

It was a wonderful thing to see Miss Sapio, with her yards of train and voluminous cloak, squeeze into a chair between the table and wall, but she only laughed good-naturedly, freeing Wainwright from the floating ends of lace and chiffon which had caught him in passing.

"Isn't it warm?" said Miss Sapio, fanning herself with energy. "You know it's awfully stuffy in here, my friend," she added familiarly to the waiter.

"Where's Hewett Addison?" asked Wainwright.

"He's gone into the country to finish his new play," said Miss Sapio. "You know what an odd fellow he is. He says he can't manage a comedy unless he's thoroughly miserable, so he took himself off to a desolate little village in Cornwall. Fancy at this time of the year! It would drive me melancholy mad."

"What news of other mutual friends?" said Stratton. "Have you seen anything of the Langleys lately, or Wilfrid Keble? Poor old Billy Hackett has made

a mess of things, hasn't he? What do you think of the Gordon affair? Heard any news of Walter Race and the bride? "

"My dear man, one thing at a time!" cried Miss Sapio, and answered the last question first.

"I've had several letters from Phosie. Do you know they've come home?"

"Have they really!" exclaimed Wainwright. "I thought they were going to honeymoon for the rest of their natural lives."

"They've only been married a couple of months," protested Miss Sapio.

"But that's a very long time according to the methods of Mr and Mrs Walter Race," observed Stratton. "They do everything in a hurry. How long were they engaged? A week, was it, or less?"

"I really can't say," answered Miss Sapio. "You know what a close card Wally is, and I couldn't get any sense out of her. I never saw a girl so ridiculously in love. Silly child! Well, I hope she likes him now she's got him."

With this wish, accompanied by a little sigh, she turned her attention to her dinner.

"Has she given up the stage?" asked Stratton.

"Good gracious, no!" said Miss Sapio. "You remember that trial turn she got at the Paramount?"

"Yes, I was there."

"Well, Hughie Addison got them to book her for three weeks' engagement this month. She opens next Monday. Hughie couldn't manage anything sooner, so my young lady seized the opportunity to get married. They've been to France and Italy."

"I have never seen her," said Wainwright.

"Oh, she's a good little soul," said Miss Sapio, filling in her spare time between the courses with olives and salted almonds.

Carl Stratton, whose shifty eyes had been held for a

few minutes by the glamour of Miss Sapio's beautiful dress, suddenly looked across the room to the little stream of people entering and leaving the restaurant.

"Talk of angels!" he exclaimed, interrupting Wainwright in the middle of a question. "Isn't that Mrs Walter Race in the fawn-coloured cloak? Yes, it is! She's with Race, of course. Doesn't look amiable, does he?"

Perhaps Tom Wainwright, the unobtrusive, quiet artist in a corner, was the only man in all that crowd who had the eyes to see the true beauty of Euphrosyne, although many heads were turned as she passed, and there was a lull in the talk at the tables near her.

Her fawn-coloured cloak hung loosely on her shoulders, fully displaying the shimmer of the white satin dress that fitted her slender figure like a glove, but ended in a long fluffy train. She was holding a bunch of roses, carelessly tied together, and a single red rose was fastened in her hair. Many of the women thought that this was old-fashioned, spoiling the effect of the Parisienne whole, but Phosie's mirror had told her a different tale. She carried her long white gloves in her hands and several rings sparkled on her fingers.

"What a pretty girl!" said one man to another.

"Look at her companion!" corrected the ladies. Mr Stratton had truly said that Walter Race looked far from amiable, but given straight features, youth and height, very few people trouble themselves over expression. He attracted as much admiring attention as his wife.

They were shown to a table far from Miss Sapio and her friends.

Phosie, pleased with the novelty of the scene, for the Nonpareil was very different from the continental hotels to which she had grown accustomed during the past two months, looked about her with happy, interested eyes.

"I feel just as if I were at the theatre," she said, looking at Race as he took his seat opposite to her. "You're like the hero of the play, Walter, and now I must find you a heroine."

Walter studied the menu, his brow clearing, while she hunted for her heroine.

"There are several ladies who will do," she said. "What do you think of the one in grey, on our right?"

"My dear child, you wouldn't condemn me to make love to a girl with an upper lip like that, would you?"

"I didn't notice it before," said Phosie. "I think she is very pretty all the same. Well, do you approve of the brunette with the gold bands in her hair?"

He glanced at the brunette.

"That inane smile would drive me crazy, even if her teeth were perfect."

"Is it inane? I only thought she looked so happy. What of the tall girl dressed in mauve?"

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed Race. "Don't you see that she is impossible?"

"What do you mean?"

He hesitated over a definition of the tall girl's impossibility.

"She would be out of the question for a man to marry, and your hero has to marry your heroine. I mean, one couldn't introduce her to one's friends. Don't you understand? No doubt she is a very estimable young woman, pretty too, but—"

"You mean she is not your equal?" interrupted Phosie. "She is not a lady."

Race finished his soup before he answered.

"That's a very bald way of putting it," then he said, "but I suppose it is correct."

Phosie crumbled her bread, looking at the smouldering, imprisoned fire of the diamond in her engagement

ring. She was pondering over the many discoveries she had made of "impossibilities"—it was one of Race's favourite words—since her marriage.

"You will have to cast yourself as the heroine after all," he said, glancing up from the wine list.

Her momentary gravity was gone. She smiled at him across the table, her eyes suddenly flooded with the light of love.

All the happiness of the past two months, the new world he had shown her, flashed through her mind. He was still a wonderful stranger, a fairy knight, King Cophetua.

"Don't you like playing the part of heroine?" said Race, too lazy to change the subject.

"Am I worthy? Are you sure I, too, am not impossible?" she asked, speaking her thoughts before she could check them.

"Foolish darling!" murmured her husband.

He looked at her critically, but with evident approval, leaning back in his chair. He wished that his brothers could see her at that minute, for like many people who cannot agree with the members of their families, Walter was more anxious than he would confess to have their good opinion.

He knew what they thought of his hasty marriage, for they had had no hesitation in telling him, but he longed to show that the unspeakable folly of it—to do him justice this was not his phrase, but his brother John's—was not without its excuse.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Phosie.

"I wish you wouldn't say that," replied Walter. "It's such a stupid, commonplace expression.

"I'm sorry! Won't say it again," said Phosie, hastily. "I suppose it isn't any better to say 'What price your thoughts,' as I mustn't mention a penny."

He could not help smiling.

"That sounds like our friend, Mr Quizzical Quilter.

By the way, dear, if you happen to come across Quizzy don't ask him to come to our place."

"No?" she queried in some surprise. "I thought you liked him and found him amusing."

"I like him well enough, but not in my own house," said Race.

"I'll remember" said Phosie.

There were so many things she had to remember.

They were drinking their coffee before Miss Sapiro, followed by Wainwright and Carl Stratton, swept down upon them.

"My dearest children!" she exclaimed, and Phosie felt instinctively that this greeting jarred upon her husband. "How delighted I am to see you. Matrimony agrees with you, Wally; you're looking gloriously fit. As for my goosie-girl—!" And she ended the sentence by kissing the bride on both cheeks.

Tom Wainwright said little after he had shaken hands warmly with them both, but Carl Stratton contrived to make Phosie very conscious of his presence. He talked about her first appearance at the Paramount, took the keenest interest in the places she had visited on her honeymoon, paid her compliments with voice and eyes, and bade her good-night at last with a reluctance which he was at no pains to conceal.

Mr and Mrs Race were going to the theatre, and parted from their friends at the door of the Nonpareil.

"I like Mr Wainwright," said Phosie, in her decisive little way, directly they were alone, "but I don't like Mr Stratton."

"Then you're not a good judge of character, my dear," replied Race. "Carl Stratton is one of the cleverest men I know."

"What is he? What does he do?" she asked.

"He's a business man, connected with a good many City Companies—you wouldn't understand about it," he answered vaguely.

"Mr Wainwright is an artist, isn't he?"

"Yes, and very successful, but he's not a man to make money, and he's got a crowd of children to provide for. We must go to see the Wainwrights. His wife's rather a trying person, but she's really very kind and hospitable."

"All your friends are kind to me," said Phosie.

He laughed, and thought again of his brothers.

At the end of the play, which Mrs Race would have enjoyed if Mr Race had not been so bored, he helped her into her cloak with an expression as fervent as if they had been tortured, instead of amused, for two hours.

"Thank God that's over!" he said. "Shall we have supper somewhere, or go home?"

"Let us go home," she answered, eagerly.

They were living in Walter Race's chambers at the top of a high, old-fashioned house in Plantagenet Court, Savoy. The lower floors were let in offices, excepting the flat immediately below their own, which was occupied by two young men who shared, with the Races, the services of a capable housekeeper.

The entrance to the house was dimly lighted, and there were nearly a hundred stairs to climb before reaching the top floor.

Phosie ran lightly up, waiting at the door for her husband, who followed more slowly, fumbling for his latch-key. He switched on an electric light in the tiny hall and led the way into his study, where, according to instructions, the housekeeper had built up a glowing fire, which collapsed into flame and warmth when he stirred it vigorously.

Phosie slipped off her cloak and knelt down on the hearthrug to warm her hands. Race, whistling an air from the musical comedy they had just seen, hung up his coat and hat, and tore open a couple of letters waiting for him on the table.

"Bills!" he said, tossing them on to the writing-table.

Then he lighted a cigarette and sat down by the fire, clasping his hands behind his head in perfect ease, while he looked at Phosie through half-closed eyelids.

It was a small room with green walls and a green-tiled open hearth. The furniture was old and well chosen; there were many bookshelves filled with books; peacock blue velvet curtains, embroidered in gold, were drawn across the windows; the door was hidden by a very handsome Japanese screen; the only pictures were a landscape by Wainwright of his beloved Yorkshire, a couple of Phil May's original drawings, and a beautiful etching by William Strang.

Three big bowls of lilies-of-the-valley filled the air with delicate perfume; the electric lights, shaded in green silk, looked like pale emeralds hanging on fine threads. The whole effect of the room was restful, soothing, luxurious.

"I can't believe it, Phosie," said Walter Race.

She looked a question.

"I can't believe that we are actually married, and that I've got you here all to myself. It's like a daydream floating out of the rings of smoke. Are you real, eh?"

He put out his hand lazily for hers, and she laid it against her cheek and turned her lips to kiss it.

Then she sat down at his feet, her soft dress billowing round her on the floor. The rose in her hair had dropped out of its right place, hanging down on her neck. Walter played with it while he talked.

"Are you real?" he repeated. "I'm horribly afraid you'll vanish as quickly as you came, or I shall wake up, stiff and cold, by the dead fire to discover that it was all a dream—our long honeymoon—those days at Cannes among the roses—"

He laughed softly, and once more clasped his hands behind his head.

"I wonder why you married me? I wonder why you love me?" said Phosie, leaning against his knee.

"Look in your glass, my darling."

"That can't be the whole reason, even if it's as good a one as you imagine," she answered quickly. "There are dozens of pretty girls in the world, far prettier than I am."

"Yes—and no, Euphrosyne," said Race. "One falls in love with beauty for the sake of what it suggests and promises, although a man doesn't think of that at the time."

"Then what does my beauty, if I've got any, suggest and promise?" cried Phosie, sitting back on her heels laughing and blushing at her own question.

He did not speak for a few seconds, then he answered in a tone of conviction with the one word:

"Mirth!"

"Is that all?" said Phosie, opening her eyes. "Did you only marry me to be amused?"

Walter burst out laughing.

"It isn't a very solemn, till-death-do-us-part kind of reason, is it, Phosie? I don't think I should have dared to tell any other woman. But you! What are you made for but laughter and delight? Elf! Thistle-down!"

He suddenly threw away his end of cigarette and held out his arms. Phosie sat on the arm of his chair, and laid her cheek against his as gently as she had caressed his hand. Her touch was always light and soft.

"Why did you fall in love with me?" he asked. "That's more to the purpose. Come, tell me! When a fairy marries a mortal, I think she ought to give an astonished world the reason."

To hear him speak in the old way for already the

days of their brief engagement had slipped into a past that was luminous and strange, filled her with exquisite pleasure.

“ I love you, humbly, deeply,” she murmured. “ You are so good to me. I love you, Walter, more and more every day.”

CHAPTER XXII

VACUOUS DAYS

MR AUGUSTUS STEWART-CROMWELL was born to be unfortunate.

His wedding present to Mr and Mrs Walter Race made Phosie's husband groan and clutch his hair. It had attracted Gus in the window of a shop in Tottenham Court Road and cost him more money than he could afford to spend. This present was a large vase of ungainly shape, with a negro boy eating a slice of melon on one side of the bowl and a kitten on the other. He was never tired of admiring the life-like pose of the kitten.

Little Gus was always nervous in the company of Walter Race, but anxious to serve him and very conscious of his superiority.

Mr Faraday, the lawyer, had succeeded in finding employment for Mr Stewart-Cromwell—Phosie impressed upon Gus, with difficulty, the necessity of using a surname—but it was done for the sole purpose of obliging Mrs Race. She had won Mr Faraday's heart, and he took Little Gus into his office.

Gus's exact position is hard to define; he was called a clerk, but his time was chiefly spent in running errands, answering the telephone, cleaning the typewriters, opening the door, reading the newspaper from end to end, and staring out of the back window of the office, which happened to command a view of a printing-house, affording him an endless source of entertainment watching the men at work.

Mr Stewart-Cromwell's salary was very small, but

he was more than satisfied, and never accepted the ten shillings a week added by Phosie without a protest.

He still continued to live in Belton Terrace, being on sufficiently good terms with the people in the house to spend several nights a week in their society, listening to the landlord's political views, amusing the baby, or quietly sitting in a corner poring over one of the children's books.

Gus was often invited to Plantagenet Court, welcomed by Phosie and good-naturedly tolerated by Walter, and when Phosie's engagement opened at the Paramount he went to the gallery nearly every night. She had no idea of this and would have been shocked at the waste of money, but Little Gus, who told her everything else, never betrayed himself.

When Hewett Addison returned to London, his new comedy finished, he found the sketch of the "Lost Fairy" in the best place in the programme at the Paramount. Miss Sapio gave him a glowing account of Phosie's success, and he hastened with his congratulations to her flat in Plantagenet Court.

He found Mrs Race alone. She was unfeignedly glad to see him, so very glad that Hewett suspected that almost any visitor would have been equally welcome. He observed that she looked weary, an expression quite new to her face, and he also observed the extravagant perfection of her dress. If it had not been Phosie he would have dubbed her a Parisienne fashion-plate.

It was spring, and the little green study was ablaze with daffodils. Hewett looked at the bells and spears of yellow and green with his usual immobility of countenance. He was moved to quote his Wordsworth, but with a slight alteration in the last line of the well-known poem:

"How oft, when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude ;

And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And I jump upon those daffodils ! ”

He said this with such gravity that Phosie did not smile. They sat down by the fire, for it was still too chilly for an empty grate, and she gave him tea. After discussing her business affairs, which had passed out of Hewett's hands into those of an energetic agent, he relapsed into silence. There was a feeling of constraint between them.

Phosie had been alone all day, and now he was formal, cold, unfriendly. She forgot, for the minute, that Hewett Addison was very different from her husband, who never troubled to hide his moods.

“ Well! What do you think of it? ” she asked, bending forward with her hands clasped lightly on her knees.

Hewett, who had been staring at his feet with a fixed attention that suggested he had discovered they belonged to somebody else, jerked up his head and read her thoughts. He made a little gesture with one hand, as expressive as if he had pointed to every object in the room, including herself.

“ I think it's delightful! ” he exclaimed. “ It's all in keeping, made to match. But, do you know, I cannot realise our absent friend. He seems out of place in the pretty picture. ”

“ Do you mean Walter? ” asked Phosie, with a smile.

“ Yes. ’

Her smile changed into a laugh.

“ Now, there you're wrong, Mr Addison, ” she protested. “ Walter is far more suited to Plantagenet Court than I am. He's a thorough Londoner, and he hates to be away from the bricks and mortar. Streets, theatres, clubs—he loves and despises them all. Do you know what I think when I see Walter, day after day, living the life he chooses to live? ”

“ Tell me, ” said Hewett, gently.

She had not changed her easy pose, leaning forward, but he saw that her hands were clenched and shook a little. This writer of comedies was a student of women, and this woman was an instinctive judge of men. There was instant and absolute confidence between them.

"He makes me think of a man who is lost in a forest of shadows, but he thinks them real," she went on. "They surround him and he can't see his way. They are shadows of pleasure, amusement, idle hours. They have blinded his eyes to the sunshine and he sees all things dimly. Other people's joy or sorrow never affect Walter—" her voice quivered a little. "Pain, suffering, poverty, he passes them all by. No! I mustn't say that. He is always generous with money."

She paused for a minute, twisting her rings round and round her fingers.

"I know you'll think I'm very sentimental in what I'm going to say, Mr Addison," she continued. "But Walter seems to me like a knight in an old legend who has been enchanted to forget the noble purposes of life. His bright sword is rusted. The wreath of his youth is fading on his brow. The world sweeps past him as he sits at the edge of the road, flicked with dust, dreaming a worthless dream."

Hewett Addison, surprised at her words, was silent for a while.

"You see what a child I am, talking about knights and enchantments," said Phosie. "You mustn't be hard on me, Mr Addison. Walter says I live in a world of my own, an imaginary, fairy-story world."

Hewett passed over this last speech in answering.

"Can't you break the spell which binds your knight, Mrs Race? I am sure you have the power if you will only exert it."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"I am afraid not. Sometimes I think that at first—"

She stopped, pondering, before beginning another sentence.

"Perhaps I am only one of the shadows in the forest where the knight is lost; perhaps if I were more earnest, older, and better trained, I should be able to help him."

"What would you have him do?" asked Hewett, curiously. "Of course he should work, but that is only a means to an end. I think a woman more often forgets this than a man, putting aside the woman who looks upon wealth as the all-important object to be obtained. She is definite enough, to do her justice."

"I don't think I look as far as you do," said Phosie. "It seems to me that every action—a man's business, his pleasure, his interests—should be the end and aim of the passing minute."

"'Sufficient unto the day'—quite so," said Hewett. "But surely you look beyond the day and its sufficiency?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered quickly. "But I was thinking of Walter's contempt for the trifles of life, and they mean so much. He says that the more one studies the world the more one laughs at it. I agree, if he would change one word. We must laugh with the world, not at it. Perhaps that is the only difference in our outlook—and perhaps—perhaps it is all nonsense, Mr Addison."

Her sudden change of tone was a relief, for their apparently light words had covered on her side a revelation of inner distress, and on his a sympathy which read her thoughts too clearly.

"As I said before, the whole effect is delightful," said Hewett, repeating the little sweeping gesture round the room.

"Have you met Walter's relations?" asked Phosie.

"I haven't had the pleasure."

"One of the brothers and his wife dined with us

yesterday—Mr and Mrs Edmund Race. They're in the Church.

"Both of them?" asked Hewett.

"Of course not! Though Walter says she writes his sermons. He's very like Walter, but not so handsome. They made me dreadfully nervous. Edmund doesn't approve of my dancing, and Alicia said my name was pagan. Edmund agreed that it was very pagan, and he thought it suited me. I wanted them to call me Phosie, like everybody else, but they wouldn't."

"What did you talk about?" asked Hewett.

Her eyes twinkled.

"Oh, principally about the weather, and the Royal Family, and the immorality of Nonconformists in his parish. Walter can't bear Alicia. They seem to make each other cross."

"Is that your husband's only brother?"

"Oh, no, there's John, who is still angry with him for marrying me. He has it firmly fixed in his head I was a barmaid. Then there's Leo, who seems to spend his life tearing about the country killing things. Frank, the youngest, is in Canada. They lost their father years ago, but their mother only died last winter. I'm afraid they were not very fond of her."

"I hope they are all going to be brotherly and sisterly to you," said Hewett.

"I hope so," echoed Phosie, wistfully. "But you see I am rather a shock—a disgrace to their house. Walter doesn't seem anxious to introduce me to them. It is a little trying, I confess, for the son of a county family to marry the daughter of a Human Eel! You must see that for yourself, Mr Addison."

They both burst out laughing, but before Hewett could straighten his face he saw, by her expression that she had forgotten both him and the subject of their mirth. Her eyes dilated and she stooped forward,

listening. She had caught the sound of a key in the front door before Hewett heard it.

"Ah, there's Walter!" she exclaimed.

Addison looked curiously at his friend as he entered the room. Their greeting was mutually cordial. Race stooped to kiss Phosie and sat down in her chair.

"Will you have some tea, dear?" she asked.

He touched the tea-pot.

"My child, it's stone cold!"

"I'll ask her to make some more, Walter. I'll get it myself," and she jumped to her feet.

"No, no! That's quite unnecessary," he said irritably. "Ring the bell."

Hewett Addison began to talk about his new comedy, for when once a work was completed he liked to discuss its possibilities with his intimate friends, and Walter quickly recovered himself. Hewett had thought, when he first came in, how ill-humour spoilt his handsome face, but Phosie admired him in any mood.

The spring drifted into summer. Her engagement at the Paramount was succeeded by a much longer engagement at one of the smaller halls. Her pleasure in the work increased with practice, and she arranged to take lessons from the best teacher of stage-dancing in London. Walter gave his consent with good-natured indifference.

His brothers, the J.P. and the clergyman, were very indignant with Phosie, and even more with Phosie's husband. They said she ought to leave the stage at once. Leo refused to join in the dispute. He admired his brother's wife and always made a point of disagreeing with John and Edmund. Walter told them to mind their own business. He had been accustomed from boyhood to family feuds, which raged all the more fiercely for frequent, and even lengthy, armistices, but they made Phosie unhappy.

"At a word from you I'll leave the stage," she told her husband.

"But I'm not going to speak it until I choose," he replied. "You're married to me, my dear, not to the bully or the parson."

The bully and the parson were the affectionate names he always bestowed upon his brothers when he happened to be quarrelling with them. His nickname for Leo was "Squire Western," but as Leo had never read *Tom Jones*—or anything else—he took it in good part.

Phosie had expected, in the first months of her marriage, to be enlightened on her husband's affairs. She knew the amount of his income, but had not the slightest idea how his money was invested. He was always in debt, much more heavily in debt than she had suspected, but beyond the occasional necessity of paying a pressing bill he seemed to ignore the fact.

He never touched a penny of her salary, the mere suggestion would have offended him, but he liked her to spend it all on dress, always consulting his taste. They entertained a great deal, Mr Carl Stratton being one of their most frequent guests. His influence over Walter grew with their intimacy, and even Phosie, concealing an innate dislike of the man, was obliged to confess that he was an amusing, courteous companion.

Her London engagement ended with the summer. She refused to go on tour. Hewett Addison promised her a new sketch for the Christmas season.

Life in Plantagenet Court was all unchanged and unchanging as the months passed by. Phosie had grown accustomed to it.

She was free in the early morning, for Walter rarely breakfasted before eleven, but as there was nothing to do in the flat she generally went out of doors, tramped through St James's Park, or along the Embankment, or into the city, often accompanying Little Gus, who called for her, to Mr Faraday's office.

In the afternoon she went out with her husband. An endless round of little pleasures filled the endless hours.

One day it would be an "At Home," the next a picture-gallery, the next a *matinée*. In the evening they dined at one or another of his favourite haunts, unless there were visitors at Plantagenet Court.

Marriage had made little difference in the careless hospitality with which Walter had always treated his friends. There were more ladies than formerly, but Race might still have been a bachelor in his freedom with the men. Dullness never barred his doors, for Euphrosyne was always gay, interested in other people's affairs, and ready to play her part in the comedy of the hour.

If Walter was bored on occasion it was not the boredom of the old days. He was no longer hopeless or cynical, but sometimes, when he looked at Phosie, he was stirred with vague self-reproach, dormant ambition, the consciousness of growth and change. She had fulfilled his hopes. He had found what he had sought, in the pursuit of mirth, no more and no less.

Satisfied and happy, he read no judgment in the fondness of his wife's eyes, but her heart had long been weary of the vacuous days.

CHAPTER XXIII

EUPHROSYNE'S GARDEN

MR & MRS RACE, when they had been married about a year and a half, left their flat in Plantagenet Court.

Miss Sapio had taken a bungalow on the river, and Walter, after spending a day there, was seized with the desire to possess a bungalow of his own.

"We shall be able to live at half our present rate," he said to his wife. "That will lift a great weight off my shoulders."

"Are you worried about money, dear?" asked Phosie, glad of the opening he had given her.

"Is that anything new?" he answered, staring gloomily out of the carriage window—they were in the train returning from the visit to Miss Sapio—and speaking in an injured voice.

"I wish you would explain your affairs to me, Walter, she urged.

"My dear girl, I wish I could explain them to myself," said Race. "I'm in a hopeless muddle, Phosie. Carl Stratton knows all about it. I believe he's going to make my fortune."

He laughed bitterly at himself.

"What has Mr Stratton got to do with us?" she said. "I can't understand your absolute reliance on another man, Walter. Surely your money is safe, isn't it?"

He stared out of the window again, his wife watching him anxiously. Then he turned slowly and looked at her. His brow cleared.

"You look as fresh as when we started," he said. "How do you manage it, Phosie? Won't it be delightful to live in the country? I'm sick of London—oh, yes, I am!" seeing her look of incredulity. "I'm sick of it. I want to have a garden, and a punt, and play golf all day."

"But tell me about your money—" she began.

"Hang it all, no!" he interrupted. "I can't encourage the discussion of disagreeable topics, my dear. You have never worried me about money and I hope you're not going to begin. It's all right. We're safe, whatever happens, with your little legacy from old Revell. How much is it? About enough for my buttonholes and cigarettes! See what it is to marry a woman of property."

Phosie was too pleased at his change of mood to resent his light contempt for "old Revell's legacy."

"I love the country," she said. "But I never dared to hope it would have any attraction for you, Walter."

"As I've often said before, you're not a judge of character, Phosie."

In less than three weeks, for Race could be very energetic when he chose, they had sub-let the flat in Plantagenet Court and moved into a small furnished house at Sterry, a village within half an hour's walk of the river.

The owners of the house were people of simple and excellent taste, and even Walter had no fault to find with the pictures and furniture.

To Phosie the change was of sheer delight. Town-bred as she was, her quick, sensitive nature at once responded to the sights and sounds of a garden. She was both patient and observant, and if there is any truth in the idea that some people are more successful with plants and flowers than others, Phosie certainly belonged to the former class.

Little Gus, who spent every week-end at Sterry, counted them as some of the happiest days of his uneventful life. He was more silent than formerly, still retained his fondness for long words, and had grown a couple of inches between his eighteenth and nineteenth birthdays. His eyes, always weak, were more red-rimmed and watery than ever and he had taken to wearing spectacles.

Perhaps there never was a man with less idea of gardening than Little Gus, for he was a Cockney to the backbone, but with none of the Cockney's sharpness and adaptability.

He worked, like an obedient child, under Phosie's directions, a slave to the lawn-mower and imbued with an absolute passion for watering the flower-beds. Gus was hardly so successful in the matter of weeding, for he generally failed to distinguish weeds from cherished slips.

"They're all of 'em so pretty," he said.

Walter Race, lying in the hammock or lounging in a low chair, in the shade of the trees, watched Little Gus working in the garden with amused interest.

"Don't you find it awfully hot, old boy?" he asked, when Gus was summoned to the tea-table.

Gus mopped his brow and took off his blurred spectacles to polish the glasses.

"I'm very fond of horticulture," he answered.

"I think you only do it to please Phosie," said Race, smiling at his wife as she brought him his tea.

"I dunno," replied Gus. "I suppose so. I wish I could do more. If I was like you, Walter, it wouldn't matter."

"What do you mean, if you were like me?" asked Walter, idly.

Gus looked up at him from his seat on the grass with humble admiration.

"You're such a fine, agreeable feller, good-looking

and all that, you don't have to exert yourself to please Phosie. You never do, you see, but of course I'm very different. She naturally expects it from me. It's no good expecting it from you. Besides, I really like horticulture. You don't."

Walter raised his head for a second, looking sharply down at Gus, but Gus was incapable of the sarcasm he suspected. He dropped back into his former position with his hat pulled over his eyes.

"So I never exert myself to please Phosie?" he repeated softly.

It was a new thought, slightly annoying, and he very wisely tried to forget it. Was there ever such a trifle—the careless speech of a simpleton like Gus—to take possession of a man's mind and start a train of thought which refused to be banished? He was amazed at himself. Why should he be compelled, and self-compelled, that was the irony of it, to think of his wife in a new light?

The following day, while this question was still lingering in the background of his mind, Miss Sapio, with the best intentions in the world, gave poor Walter another little shock of surprise.

She had been spending the day at Sterry, accompanied by Mr Quizzical Quilter, and, as ill-luck would have it, his brother Edmund had also paid them an unexpected visit.

Phosie's eyes fairly danced with amusement when the Reverend Edmund was announced and she met her husband's despairing glance.

Was there ever a more incongruous party! She greeted her brother-in-law with an affectionate cordiality that more than compensated for Walter's coldness, introduced her other guests, and made up her mind, whatever happened, to hold the whip hand in the conversation.

Fortunately Miss Sapio was in a quiet mood, and

Phosie saw at once, although such a possibility never occurred to Walter, that Edmund Race was moved to unwilling admiration by her striking, if aggressive, beauty

Their hostess, by tactful avoidance of subjects on which they could never agree, positively made them think they liked each other.

The management of Quizzly, in white flannels with a striped orange and red sash, was a more delicate task. Walter would have snubbed him unmercifully, but Phosie was too kind-hearted. She made him sit by her at lunch, listened to his stories attentively, but contrived to interpose the skilful word, or the light jest, which prevented the others from drifting into any serious discussion.

It was Mr Edmund Race himself who caused her trouble. At first he had treated Quizzly with a distant patronage that depressed the veteran, but after tea, when they were all sitting on the lawn, he turned the conversation on the subject of the stage, for the Reverend Edmund flattered himself on being all things to all men. His wife called him a student of humanity, which sounds better than saying a man is inordinately inquisitive about other people's affairs.

"You must have had a very varied experience of theatrical life, Mr Quilter?" said the clergyman.

Mr Quilter squeezed up his face, as if it were made of india-rubber, and nodded a great number of times before replying.

"I am fifty-one years of age, sir," he replied—Quizzly was sixty-three—"and I've been in the profession ever since I could toddle. I made my first appearance as a black-beetle."

"Good gracious, Quizzly! How disgusting!" exclaimed Miss Sapio

"That was in panto," he continued. "My poor old father was the pantaloon, my uncle was clown, my

Cousin Joe was the bobby, and my little sister Rose was columbine. All in the family, snug and comfortable. My mother put me into a pair of her stockings for tights, and I came on all by myself in the kitchen scene. Of course I couldn't do much, but I just 'threw a flip-flap' and stood on my head. It went immense. It's wonderful how the public appreciate a neat, clean little bit of old-fashioned stuff."

"Of what description—er—what do you mean by stuff?" asked the Reverend Edmund.

"A good bit o' business, you twig," explained Mr Quilter. "Take standing on your head, for instance. It isn't so very difficult, not if you've been trained right, but it always goes."

"If it is in its right place," suggested Phosie. "You wouldn't recommend every actor to try standing on his head, would you?"

"Of course not, my dear," said Quizzy, taking her question very seriously. "It would never do in Shakespeare. The public don't expect to be livened up when they come to see what we used to call the legitimate. It was different in the old burlesques and in this modern musical comedy. I don't know whether you'll agree with me, sir," Quizzy went on, turning to the clergyman, "but I don't believe in serious drama. The stage isn't a pulpit. People come to the theatre to enjoy themselves. They want to see the bright side o' life. It's our business to show it 'em. God bless my soul! What are we actors made for?"

"You are certainly a merry band!" said the Reverend Edmund, with an attempt to be jovial. "Sometimes we envy you, we serious folk. Yes, we do. But we can't all be jesters, Mr Quilter. It must be very delightful to act in a pantomime with one's relatives."

"Can you imagine us acting in a pantomime with ours?" asked Walter, drily. "Phosie would make a

captivating columbine, but I can't see you as a rattlingly funny clown, Edmund."

"My dear Walter, don't be so ridiculous!"

"Quite right, Mr Race," said Quizzical Quilter. "I can't picture your brother in our business. I'm afraid he wouldn't make a success of it. Well, we've all got our own walk in life. We can't be equally talented."

The Reverend Edmund glared at Quizzy, but Walter burst out laughing, and Miss Sapio tried not to smile. Euphrosyne saved the situation by a tactful allusion to her brother-in-law's fine elocution. She was sure Mr Quilter would appreciate it, and the fortunate arrival of Mr Carl Stratton prevented Quizzy becoming anecdotal on his own elocution.

Walter's ill-humour passed away, and he began to enjoy himself. Stratton was encouraged by his hostess to describe some of his adventures in the Far East, for he had travelled extensively and could talk well on the subject. Quizzy was flattered by her constant attention for the rest of the afternoon, and Edmund Race actually told his wife, when he returned home, that he had found his visit extremely pleasant on the whole, extremely pleasant.

Miss Sapio stopped to dinner, and it was when Walter was putting her into her hired pony carriage that she made the following remark about Euphrosyne:

"You must be very proud of your wife, Wally. I never knew anybody so tactful and well bred. Hewett Addison likes to talk to her, and he's an exceptionally clever man, we must all acknowledge that. Your brother seems fond of her, and I suppose she's a favourite with the rest of the family?"

He made some trifling reply, stood in the road until the pony-carriage disappeared, and then returned slowly to the house.

Walter had not introduced Phosie to his eldest brothers

purposely keeping them apart, and he searched for a true reason for the first time since his marriage.

Was he ashamed of her? No, a hundred times no!

Thus he answered himself as sternly as he would have answered anybody else, but at the same time his secret heart arraigned his loyalty. Why had he always told himself that she was worthy? What did he mean by that? Worthy to be his wife—his equal? Yes! But was he worthy to be her husband—her equal? Ah! that was a new thought.

It was a beautiful evening, clear and still, and reminded him of the starry night when he had loved Phosie so well. A great bed of evening primroses glowed in the moonbeams like fairy lamps. The sweet scent of nicotine hung in the air.

At the sound of his step on the gravel Phosie appeared at the open door leading into the drawing-room. She had turned out the lamp and stood waiting as he came near, the moonlight gleaming on her white dress.

"You must be very tired," said Walter.

She gave a tiny start of surprise at his solicitude.

"Only a little," she answered, stepping through the doors. "Let us walk round the garden."

They strolled along in silence, Walter smoking, with one hand in his pocket. There was a soft, warm breeze, and suddenly a nightingale began to sing.

"Listen!" said Phosie, laying her hand on his arm.

They stood still. The throbbing notes floated into the silence of the night. The leaves stirred to murmurous music. The moon swept out from a veil of clouds.

Walter Race, as the nightingale stopped singing, looked into the face upturned to his.

"'On such a night'"—he said.

Phosie threw her arms round his neck, and laid her cheek to his, with the soft caress he knew so well.

"Tears?" said Walter. "What is the matter with my little elf? Moonbeam! Come, tell your lover. Somehow, to-night, we feel like lovers again, don't we, Phosie?"

"No—husband and wife—dearer—nearer—" she answered, brokenly.

Surprise and doubt possessed him, but only for a few seconds, then he was certain of the truth and stooped down, for her face was hidden on his breast.

"Tell me!" he said, and she whispered in his ear.

"It is true at last, Walter! Ours! A little one—yours and mine, love. Our own!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE INDIVIDUALITY OF JANE

THE summer at Sterry was followed by a period of great prosperity for Walter Race.

A spin in the fickle wheel of Fortune whirled Mr Carl Stratton into wealth. All he touched turned, for a while, into gold. His friend, who was, figuratively speaking, hanging on to the flap of his pocket, shared the good luck.

Phosie found herself in possession of a motor and a maid. She would have liked to remain at Sterry, but her husband was anxious to get back to town.

Plantagenet Court no longer satisfied him; he found it too cramped, simple and old-fashioned.

The West End was explored and a house secured, not exactly in Park Lane, but in one of the adjacent streets. It was small, dull and expensive; a thin house with obscure, diamond-paned windows, and a huge brass knocker on a beautifully painted door. The privilege of owning such a knocker, Hewett Addison said, was doubtless considered in the rent.

The interior decorations were conventionally handsome, and Walter's choice of furniture could be described by the same adjectives.

There was a small dining-room on the ground floor, panelled in dark wood, with a highly-polished round table, olive green curtains, and high-backed, green leather-covered chairs.

The pale blue-and-white drawing-room was adorned with silk hangings and lamp shades of the same tint,

together with dainty French furniture. To quote Hewett again, it suggested Act II. of a Society comedy at the St. James's Theatre.

The largest bedroom was in a perpetual blush of rose-pink, and possessed an adjoining cupboard called a dressing-room. The two spare bedrooms were principally to be noted for an uninterrupted view from their windows of assorted tiles and smoky chimneys, affording a popular resort for the cats of the neighbourhood.

The study—most inappropriate name for any room in Temple Street, Mayfair—was so dark that it was impossible to read or write, even on a sunny day, without artificial light.

The basement was like a dungeon, with cells for the servants to sleep in. Such were the chief attractions of a house for which Mr Walter Race had the privilege of paying two hundred and fifty pounds a year.

Euphrosyne would never have taken it, but she was overruled by her husband.

"Of course this is very pretty," she confessed, looking round the blue-and-white drawing-room, "but there is so little light, and the servants' rooms are so tiny."

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" exclaimed Walter. "And as for there being no light, it's foggy everywhere to-day."

"I wish we could have had a garden, dear," she said timidly. "Or even a yard with only a plot of grass or a couple of bushes."

The house-agent's clerk smiled indulgently. He was accustomed to the irrational desires of prospective tenants.

"You are within a stone's throw of Hyde Park, madam," he said.

"But it might be a hundred miles away for all I can see of it," answered Phosie, peering through the little window-panes at the houses opposite.

"But it isn't a hundred miles away, madam," said the clerk, gravely. "I assure you it is within a stone's throw. It would be difficult to obtain a house more pleasantly situated as regards Hyde Park. As a gentleman in our office said last week, Temple Street is positively next door to it."

"Exactly. No doubt it's a great advantage," said Walter.

"The staircase is rather narrow, isn't it?" observed Phosie, as they descended to the study. "And this room is so very gloomy."

"Of course it is, madam, without the electric light," said the clerk. "Allow me to get at the switch. There! What a difference!"

"Don't you think it's a disadvantage to be so closely walled in by other houses?" asked Phosie.

"Not at all, madam, when you are accustomed to it," said the clerk, patiently. "I assure you some of the best flats on our books are entirely dependent on artificial light. In fact many people prefer it, especially ladies. It is more soft, more easily regulated. There's a certain uncomfortable glare about sunshine. It spoils one's carpets and furniture."

"Then you think it would be well to keep sunshine out of one's house altogether?" asked Phosie, with her twinkling eyes on the sallow face of the clerk.

"I shouldn't go as far as that, madam," he replied. "But I certainly think all those kind of things—wind, sunshine and rain—properly belong to the country. We can do without them in towns."

"Of course we can!" said Walter, who had not been listening. "What I like about this house is the situation. I don't believe we could do better. It pleases me. It is just what I want."

"Then it pleases me too, Walter," she answered quickly.

"You really mean that? You will be happy here?"

The clerk had gone out of the room for a minute. Phosie seized the opportunity to slip her hand into Walter's and give it a little squeeze.

"I am happy anywhere with you," she said.

So it was settled. They missed the fresh air and pretty garden at Sterry, and even the outlook over the river at Plantagenet Court, but all their friends congratulated them on the new house.

Phosie wished, as the long autumn days dragged on, that her husband would show half as much interest in the advent of the younger Walter—she had made up her mind it would be a son—as he did in furnishing his dark little study. He was seized with a mania for "picking up" curiosities. Too shrewd to be easily gulled, he spent his money to greater advantage than the usual amateur collector, and the limited space at his disposal held him in check. If he had purchased all his discoveries it would have been necessary for the family to camp in the road, for the house would have been too crowded to hold them.

When Walter thought of the coming child at all it was with mixed feelings of whimsical pleasure and half-awakened, not wholly welcome, responsibility.

Without regretting his hasty marriage, for his life before Phosie came into it was dull and loveless to contemplate, he had long regarded it as an unaccountable step, an inconceivable imprudence. He refused to take himself seriously, or to look upon his wife as other than a little strange girl who had opened his heart with a laugh and seized the opportunity to take possession.

A younger Walter had no place in the older Walter's imagination. He always thought of the child as a second Phosie, with its mother's eyes, her colouring, her disposition.

Well, a Phosie in miniature might be very amusing. He had always hoped for the birth of a girl and his hopes were realised.

The little Dorothea, for so they named her, was a brown-skinned baby with big, mournful eyes, and a quantity of silky, dark hair.

Utterly unlike her mother, Walter Race looked at her for the first time with the surprise that follows the shattering of an idea. Then he smiled at his own expectations. He had thought to see the likeness to Phosie in an infant of less than three hours old! It was as absurd as the whisper of his wife that she could see the likeness to himself.

He laid the tiny, boneless hand in his palm, and the strength of his nature ebbed and flowed into gentle compassion and unknown tenderness.

This was reality—the wife, the child—and it gripped his heart.

The opening years of little Dorothea's life were spent, as Hewett Addison once observed, in the reflected splendour of Mr Carl Stratton's speculations.

She lived in Temple Street, Mayfair, and possessed everything that money could buy.

Her first impressions of the outer world were of a great green plain, with trees that looked as if they would reach the sky; endless flowers; big, alarming creatures rushing about with their mouths open, called dogs; other babies, being wheeled beside her own baby carriage, at whom she stared in wordless interest; children with huge, unmanageable hoops or balls that she could never catch; and superior beings, in stiff dresses and little bonnets, one of whom was her exclusive property and named "Nanna.

Her life within doors was very interesting. There were so many rooms and such endless stairs! What a memorable day when she first started to climb up those stairs. It was so difficult that it made her pant, but there was no reason for the unnecessary excitement of somebody who rushed into the hall shouting, "Nurse! Nurse! Come and look at baby!"

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The people who surrounded her were all more or less important, and she studied their peculiarities with grave, critical eyes long before she had mastered speech.

One of them was very big and in the habit of swinging her up in the air, but never paid any attention to such vital matters as her meals or her bath. This person had dark hair which was pleasant to clutch, and a broad shoulder to sit upon. He was far more generous with lumps of sugar and sweets than anybody else in the house.

Then there was somebody, whom they called Cook, living downstairs in a room with a roaring fire, her chief characteristics being a big red face and a dangling little toy in each ear that it was a great temptation to pull. This person's only charm lay in the fact that she captured a soft, furry animal wandering about the floor and held it in her arms to be stroked.

But of all the baby's little world she was most attached to the person who sat in the same room as the broad-shouldered man. Her face was so much softer than his, and her voice was gentle. It was good to nestle against her breast, there being no hard buttons on her dress, like there were on Nanna's, and she made a low, crooning noise which sent one to sleep.

She often knelt down on the floor to play, or rolled Dorothea over on her back, tickling her till she choked with laughter. She was never cross like Nanna, or indifferent like the man, but always smiling. It was a glorious thing to leave the security of the seat of a chair, totter a few uncertain steps, and fall into the haven of her loving arms.

All these were the first impressions of Dorothea's life. She resembled her father in every way. It pleased him, but awakened an unreasonable surprise in his mind. She was not the elf he had expected, but a very human child, looking at him wonderingly with eyes just like his own.

"Dad" was the first word she spoke, but it was not bestowed, after the usual manner of babies, on any man whom she wished to address. If she did not see her father for a whole day, she did not speak for a whole day. It was a long time before she gave her mother any name, always greeting her with cooing, indistinct sounds of love.

There was none of Phosie's levity about her daughter. She displayed, at an early age, determination of character coupled with feminine vanity.

On one occasion, when Walter returned home unexpectedly in the middle of the morning, he heard the sound of uproarious laughter in the nursery. He threw open the door to discover his wife, Miss Sapio, and the nurse assisting the baby to make her choice from a pile of new bonnets, sent on approbation from a shop in Oxford Street.

The baby, steadying herself by the seat of a chair, was standing in front of a long mirror. A bonnet was placed on her head by the nurse. She looked at the reflection for a minute and then plucked it fiercely off and threw it on the floor. One after another was treated in the same way, to the joy of the beholders, until the appearance of swansdown and lace changed her frown into an ecstatic smile, and she turned up her face for the strings to be tied under her chin.

She was equally firm in the matter of shoes, kicking or wriggling out of any pair she did not like with little grunts of denunciation.

Her second and third words were "Bark" and "Mew," addressed to the dog and cat, and evidently to be regarded as a protest against the inanimity of "Bow-wow" and "Tiddy."

It was at the arrival of a new nurse that this thoughtful child first displayed her gift for bestowing appropriate names.

She had had one Nanna, and considered it ridiculous

to call an utterly different person by the same name. So she turned to her mother, after staring at the stranger for several minutes, with an expression of one who has solved a problem.

"Ada!" she said, pointing to the new nurse.

Protests were unavailing. It was "Ada" from that day forward, for no one could induce her to say Nanna.

On another occasion, after mature reflection, she gave the name of Maude to a tall, haughty housemaid who happened to have been christened Daisy; ordained that the cook should be known as Mrs Stout—this was more obvious than her usual attempts—and dignified the boy who cleaned the windows and knives, hitherto called Bob, by the name of Mr Roberts. She won Little Gus's heart by calling him "Mine Gussy."

It is customary to ask children their names, but for a long time Miss Dorothea Race refused to answer the question. She was making up her mind, but a day came when she had reached a decision.

"What are you called, dear?" asked a lady who was calling on her mother.

"Jane," was the prompt reply.

"No, my darling," said Phosie, laughing, "your name is Dorothea."

"Jane," repeated the child.

Phosie told this to her husband.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "That's very appropriate. One of my rich aunts is named Jane. I recollect that we had an old sampler at home, hanging in the schoolroom, that was worked by my grandmother, who was another Jane."

"But it's such a prim little name," said Phosie. "I remember Mr Revell singing the tune of one of Sims Reeves's favourite songs called 'My pretty Jane.' It suggests a crinoline and ringlets."

"I should rather say that it suggests an enigmatical character," put in Hewett Addison, who was

dining at Temple Street. "Dorothea stands for romance, or sentiment, or saintliness; names of two or three syllables generally do, but the apparently unpromising simplicity of J-a-n-e is full of possibilities. No Jane was ever like any other Jane."

"Define your own idea of a Jane," said Walter.

"My study is too elementary," replied Hewett. "Of course the first Jane one thinks about is Shelley's Jane Williams. You remember the end of the poem, 'Ariel to Miranda, with a Guitar':

" ' It keeps its highest, holiest tone,
For our beloved Jane alone.'

"Then for a couple of contrasts, could two women be more unlike each other than Jane Austen and Jane Welsh Carlyle? Let me see, we've only had one of our queens named Jane, haven't we? Jane Seymour, you know, Henry VIII.'s third wife. Lady Jane Grey was quite a different historical heroine, so was Jane Shore. Thomas Hood married a lady called Jane, didn't he? And Coventry Patmore gave life and reality to the name in his *Victories of Love*."

"I begin to think you're an advanced student," said Phosie. "What about Jane in fiction?"

Hewett pondered a second.

"Well, I suppose Mrs Fairfax Rochester has the first claim on our admiration. Miss Austen has given us a couple of captivating Janes—Miss Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* and Miss Fairfax in *Emma*. Thackeray's Lady Jane Newcome is a poor little soul. I don't think Dickens has done justice to the name. Nobody can call Miss Murdstone a lovable person, but there's just a line about a nice girl named Jane at the Bath Assembly Rooms in *Pickwick*, and don't you remember sweet little Jane Pocket in *Great Expectations*?"

"Are there Janes to be found on the stage?" asked Phosie.

"I can only think of two modern instances," said Hewett. "There's the tantalising heroine of Henry Arthur Jones's *Manœuvres of Jane*, and Gilbert's majestic Lady Jane in *Patience*. By the way, don't you recollect the name of Miss Jane Porter, who wrote a novel called *The Scottish Chiefs*; and, plunging still farther back into the days of our infancy, we've all heard of 'Naughty, naughty little Miss Jane.' I have a hazy idea that she spent sixpence on raspberry rock and spoiled her dinner as well as her frock. I am sure your daughter has chosen her name well. After all, Dorothea Race sounds like the heroine of a novel. Jane Race might be a woman of genius."

On the following morning her father greeted the baby as Jane. She responded cordially. Her mother called her Dorothea. She made no response at all.

So it was settled. Jane was Jane to the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER XXV

FRANK RACE'S STORY

PHOSIE had not forgotten Jules Revell, although she never spoke of him.

The impression of fear and abhorrence which he had made on her mind deepened with the passing of time. She deceived herself in thinking that indifference had succeeded contempt. An exaggerated hatred of this man was a flaw in the crystal clearness of her nature.

Even when she knew that his passion for herself—the passion he had sworn was undying—had passed away and he was married to another woman, the thought of him still had the power of distressing and agitating her. She realised this on the few occasions when they had seen each other in the streets. Once at a concert, when he had taken the seat just behind her, she knew without turning her head that he was there.

Jules had married his neighbour, Lily Parlow, who had grown into a pretty, pink-and-white girl, and inherited, at the death of her elderly parents, a not inconsiderable fortune. Jules was amazed at the amount, and his clandestine love-making, which had never been suspected by her doting father and mother, suddenly became serious.

They were married before the grass had had time to grow on the newly-made graves, for Lily did not believe in sentimental sorrow, and the bridegroom's fingers itched for the hoarded hundreds.

As she read and tore to pieces the wedding-cards, carefully sent by Mrs Jules Revell, Phosie Race smiled

and sighed. She had loved and admired Lily Parlow, loved her still, but the little silver arrow thrust through her name ended the friendship of their girlhood.

Time passed on. The Revells lived in the old house in The Stroll, and Euphrosyne on the other side of the great world of London.

One summer's day, when Phosie was playing with little Jane in the drawing-room, a most unexpected and welcome guest arrived at Temple Street. Of all her husband's brothers she least thought of seeing Frank, but oddly enough they had been talking about him that very day.

Jane was sitting on the floor, playing with a Noah's Ark of white wooden animals, and her mother knelt beside her, obeying instructions. The silk blinds were drawn down, and the room was pleasantly cool.

Walter Race lay on the lounge in his favourite attitude, feet crossed and hands clasped behind his head, watching them. A new pleasure in Phosie's society seemed to be slowly developing in her husband. The old careless words of endearment—elfin, fairy, moonbeam—were rarely on his lips at this time. She missed their sweetness, and an expression she often surprised in his eyes puzzled her. It was a thoughtful, questioning expression she could not fathom.

"Now, the el'phants," commanded Jane, marshalling her forces. "And those very ugly an'mals last of all."

"Why do you call Mr and Mrs Noah very ugly animals, Jane?" asked Phosie.

Before Jane could give her reason, for she always had a reason, her father spoke.

"There's the bell and thundering knock!" he exclaimed. "Hang it, Phosie! I don't want to see anybody this afternoon. I want to have tea alone with you and the kiddy."

"Be quick and tell Parker I'm not at home," answered his wife, flushed with pleasure at this unusual desire.

He jumped to his feet and hurried out of the room, but it was too late. The door had been opened and the visitor admitted.

Walter looked over the banisters, and a man who was standing, hat in hand, in the hall below looked up at him.

The light fell full on Walter's face, and he could see the stranger almost as clearly. They eyed each other in silence for a second. Mutual recognition flashed into their eyes, but there was no effusion in their greeting, although it was nine years since they had parted. They were Englishmen, and this is all that they said:

"Is that you, Wally?" from the stranger in the hall.

"Yes. Come up, Frank!" from the man leaning over the banisters.

Phosie had heard the voices and scrambled to her feet, full of excitement and surprise.

She stared in amazement at Frank Race when he first entered the room, her husband's arm locked in his. He closely resembled Walter in height and colouring, but he was a broader, heavier man; his thick hair grew low on his forehead; a well-cut beard did not hide his massive, but firmly modelled jaw; his blue eyes were small and twinkling.

There was something of the freshness of three thousand miles of salt water about him, for he had landed the previous night, and he gave the impression of vigour, good-temper and rude health.

"Here's Frank, Phosie!" said Walter, slapping him on the back. "Dear old Frank! this is my wife."

Phosie recovered from her surprise, and the newcomer, grasping both her hands, looked down into her eager face with pleasure and admiration.

"Thank you! Thanks!" he exclaimed. "I didn't

expect such a welcome. How good it is of you, Wally! Both of you."

Phosie, with a sudden impulse, stood on tiptoe and gave him a kiss.

"I've so looked forward to seeing you, Frank," she said.

Frank was too grateful to answer, and, with characteristic bluntness, changed the subject.

"Is this your little girl, Walter? My word! She's a daisy! Will you come and speak to your Uncle Frank, honey?"

Jane, who had been an interested observer of the scene, advanced slowly, studying the big man so like her father. She permitted him to swing her up in the air, for it was a delightful, airy sensation, and when he put her down she smiled graciously.

"I shall call you Uncle Bill," said Jane.

"Why will you call me that?" asked Frank Race, passing his hand over her dark, wavy hair.

"It is a jolly name," she replied. "I think you are a jolly man."

"I almost told the servant we were not at home!" said Walter. "What would you have done, old boy?"

"Waited on the doorstep, Wally."

"Have you written to your other brothers yet?" asked Phosie.

"Not yet. I mean to give them a surprise, but of course I came to your husband first. We were always pals, Wally and I."

"Of course you will stop with us," said Walter. "I'm not going to let John or Leo take possession of you."

"What does sister Phosie say?" asked Frank.

"Sister Phosie will be only too delighted," she replied.

"Us will be on'y too delighted," added Jane, who usually acted as her mother's echo.

Frank Race was given the spare room overlooking

the tiles and chimneys, where he sighed for the buoyant winds and open skies of fair Ontario. He and Phosie became great friends.

Walter, after a long period of ease, was troubled again over business affairs. His wife had relinquished any hope of his confidence; her questions at first had annoyed, and afterwards depressed, him. She was quick to adapt herself, in that as in everything else, to his wishes.

Frank, who was both shrewd and observant, failed to understand the attitude of his brother. He could not be accused of neglecting Phosie, but he treated her very much as he treated the child. She was his property, bound to amuse him, a somewhat expensive luxury perhaps, but one that certainly did him credit.

One day, when Frank Race had been their guest for about six weeks, he was alone with Phosie for the whole evening, Walter having telegraphed that he was dining with Mr Carl Stratton.

It was a chilly, wet night, although August was still young, and they abandoned the idea of going out. Frank had just returned from a week-end at his brother John's house, and he entertained Phosie with character sketches of the people he had met.

They talked and laughed, well pleased with each other's society, during dinner, but Frank became thoughtful as the hour grew later. Phosie, accustomed to her husband's changeable moods, did not worry him with senseless conversation. Her own embroidery held her attention, for she happened to be working against time to complete a birthday present for Mrs Edmund Race.

Frank smoked his pipe in silence for a long while, his heavy face set and gloomy. The idea came into Phosie's head, as she glanced at him, that he would be a terrible man roused to anger, a murderous man if he lost his self-control. For the minute he lost all resemblance, in her eyes, to her husband. He was repugnant

to her with his dark frown and big, sullen jaw, but even as the thought took shape he met her eyes and she was ashamed of it. His kind, genial expression returned and he smiled at her affectionately.

"You've been awfully good to me, Phosie," he said. "I admire you more than Alicia or John's wife, and I like you better than the whole pack of 'em put together."

"I don't think it is respectful to call your sisters-in-law a pack!" she laughed.

He did not answer. He was busy with his own thoughts.

"Phosie!" he exclaimed, and the sharpness of the tone made her drop her work and give him her whole attention. "Phosie, can you keep a secret? It seems to me you're different from most women. I don't think you chatter."

"On the contrary, Frank, I am always chattering. But I am sure I can keep a secret."

"Perhaps I shouldn't call it a secret," he went on slowly. "I should like to tell you about my life in Canada. I feel that I can trust you, my dear little sister."

Phosie laid aside her work and looked at him attentively. She had a strange sense of foreboding, a vague premonition of what he was going to tell her. He began with carefully considered words, soon forgotten in his natural bluntness.

"You know I had rather a hard time when I first went out—'tough' as they say West—for I was quite unfitted for the life I had to lead. I got into a scrape at home and they packed me off. It was in the days when people looked on Canada as a dumping ground for undesirable younger sons.

"At first I was wretched. Wretched! I shall never understand why I didn't hang myself. I hated the people and the climate and the food and the whole

darned business. You know I was only a lad of twenty.

"A man with whom I crossed gave me some work to do in his factory at Montreal, clerking, but I found it dull and only stopped with him about six months. I must have been an ungrateful little brute in those days. Then I tried my luck in Ottawa, then Toronto, then Hamilton—in fact, all the big cities in that part of Ontario have had the honour of employing my services at one time or another. I managed to earn a very fair living on the whole—"

"In what way?" interrupted Phosie.

He laughed.

"All sorts of ways, my dear. I was on the road for a time as a 'drummer,' that's a commerical traveller you know; then I had a very good job as assistant manager of a vinegar factory—I know all about vinegar, Phosie—and I've served in a dry goods store and even worked on the railway. I put in one season in a lumber camp in Quebec, and I had the time of my life ranching in Alberta. Can you picture me as a 'cow-puncher,' Phosie? I lived in the saddle, and I wish to Heaven I'd never come East again. But I returned to Ontario some years ago, almost as poor as when I first landed.

"I couldn't make up my mind what to do, so I determined to take it easy during the hot weather, for it was the beginning of July, and make my money last out till the Fall.

"I had landed up at a dull little town where I knew I could live cheaply. It was a deadly dull little town, called Cooling River, with one hotel on the main street. I boarded at this hotel, and it was there I met the inevitable woman. Woman! She didn't live to be a woman. She was just a slip of a girl. Strange little being with wonderful eyes! I can't describe her, Phosie. I never understood her. She was the hotel people's daughter—a spoilt child.

"Her mother was a poor, worn creature, with the same delicate features and dark eyes. They were extraordinarily like each other, and it troubled me from the first, for the mother looked as if Death had got her by the wrist, dragging her away. The girl, in spite of her youth and bloom, had the same narrow chest and pale lips.

"We were always together, day after day, and I got to love her desperately—desperately! That's the word. I would have done anything in the world to make her happy. I wanted to be married at once, for her sake more than my own, to take her away from the dull little town, which she hated, to the golden West. She might have lived in California. I might have saved her."

He stopped speaking, shading his eyes from the light. Phosie drew nearer to him with the sincere sympathy that needs no words. After a few minutes he continued his story.

"I was at my wits' end to make some money. There was nothing to be done in Cooling River, and I hated the thought of leaving Mehala. Our days together were so beautiful, sometimes on the river in our canoes, sometimes in the maple woods. It was at the end of September, just when everything was turning golden for the Fall, that I saw an opportunity of making a fortune. What a fool I was!

"One evening, when Mehala and I were strolling home, we stopped to look at a small poster in the front window of a grocery store. Anything new attracts one's attention in a one-horse town like Cooling River. This poster announced a concert at the town, to be given the following week.

"Mehala clapped her hands with delight. I can see her now! Of course I promised on the spot to take her to the concert. I bought a couple of tickets and I don't think we talked of anything else.

"You know they call every kind of show a 'concert' in Canada, but there wasn't very much music about

this one. It was given by three people, an actor and his wife, who both sang, and a young fellow who was the manager."

Frank Race was not looking at Phosie as he talked, or he would have seen how intensely his story interested her. She hung on his words.

"These people arrived in Cooling River on the day of the concert," he went on. "Of course they put up at the hotel, and I sat opposite to them at dinner. We dined at the unearthly hour of half-past twelve in the morning. The actor was an old, clever-looking chap, but I guessed at once that he was in the habit of raising his elbow. His wife was a pretty little shrew who kept him in fairly good order. The manager I took to be little more than a boy, for he looked much younger than he really was, with a fine fresh colour, clear eyes, and no end of nerve."

"Do you remember his name?" asked Phosie, in a voice which trembled.

Frank Race gave an ugly laugh.

"Remember his name? Yes! It was Revell—Jules Revell—the damned scoundrel!"

The colour rushed into his listener's face, and he thought she was offended at his violent words, but she checked his apology with an impatient gesture and told him to go on.

"I made friends with this Revell at dinner. How he could talk! I've never heard his equal, and that's saying a good deal for a man who has been 'on the road.' We spent the afternoon together and I helped him fix up the platform for the show.

"At supper he was introduced to Mehala and her mother and they both liked him. He was a born flatterer. The concert was quite a success, for the hall was packed, and Revell cleared over forty dollars.

"It seemed to me a very easy way of earning money, and I told him so, half in joke, when we were all sitting

together in the hotel parlour afterwards. He agreed, and asked me why I didn't go in for it. Mehala clapped her hands again—it was a pretty little trick of hers—and said I could sing and recite better than anybody she had ever heard. There was an old square piano in the room, and Revell insisted on hearing me. We'd got a stock of old music, and Mehala had learned to play my accompaniments. I sang half a dozen times, then I recited, then Mehala sang, then we tried a duet. It was a very jolly evening, and before we parted I had half promised to invest my last dollars in the Revell-Race Imperial Concert Party—Jules made up the name on the spot—on sharing terms.

“By the following morning the scheme had lost some of its glamour, but Mehala implored me not to give it up. She was sick of Cooling River and her quiet home life. Revell had bewitched her. She knew nothing of the world and firmly believed all his fairy stories.

“He stopped at our town, having a vacant week, and did everything in his power to win me over. I confess I liked him. He was full of life, and ingenuously frank and self-reliant. Our friendship grew in leaps and bounds, but I felt that I couldn't leave Mehala, and what was the alternative?

“We must be married at once and I must take her with me. Phosie! I know what you are going to say. It was foolish, inconsiderate, wrong! I had no money, and I was condemning her to the hardships and discomforts of touring the country with a second-rate show. True! But you can't be more indignant with me than I am with myself. I did it, but God knows I've been punished more than I deserve.”

“I am not indignant with you, dear Frank,” said Phosie, gently. “I am so sorry for you.”

“We kept our plans from Mehala's parents,” Frank Race continued. “It was a mean thing to do, but I knew they would never give their consent. We didn't

even tell Revell until it was over. He was intensely surprised, but I remember how he wrung my hand and wished me joy. The old man at Cooling River was very generous and they both forgave us, but I'm afraid it helped to kill the poor mother. She never saw Mehala again.

"The Imperial Concert Party was very successful, thanks to Revell, and I was very happy with my little girl. I soon found out she didn't love me as I had imagined, but she was always sweet and gentle. We made money and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Revell seemed to grow more and more attached to me, for he was always in our company, but I noticed that Mehala didn't care for him.

"Their manner to each other changed. At first they had been great friends, but she grew silent and nervous, and Revell treated her with absolute indifference. Without actual words he made me understand that my wife was antagonistic to him, and he was always hinting I had thrown myself away.

"So our life together went on for six months—six months!—and then—then—"

He broke off abruptly, rose to his feet and took a few quick turns up and down the room.

Phosie's eyes followed his movements, but her thoughts were in the past. She saw the well-remembered room in the old house at The Stroll, and Jules Revell, in a passion that had frightened her, ramming the torn photographs into the fire.

Frank Race threw himself into his chair, started to re-light his pipe, but laid it aside. It was several minutes before he spoke.

"I suppose you guess the end," he said bitterly. "You are not so blind as I was. You don't know what it is to be the husband of a woman one trusts—loves!"

Again he was silent. Her restraining hand laid on his seemed to calm him.

"It all happened in a couple of weeks, Phosie," he said, with extraordinary simplicity. "He took her away from me—forced her—persuaded her to go—one night after the performance. I followed them, but there was no clue. I was dazed. Confounded! I think I was out of my mind. I hoped to murder him. I can't tell you about it—let it pass—you understand—"

"Yes! Yes!"

"When I found her she was alone—alone, Phosie!—penniless, heart-broken, in a wretched little room, with the plaster in great patches off the walls and ceiling. It was a beggarly hotel at a town off the railway line. She was cold—I felt her little feet—the brute to desert her, the brute! We just looked at each other and she said, 'Oh, Frank! Frank!' Nothing else. She never asked me to forgive her. There was no need. I just put out my arms and she—"

He stopped altogether. Phosie's hand gripped his, and then relaxed. She rose and walked to the other side of the room, turning her back on him. She gave him time to recover his self-control. After a few seconds he called her back.

"My wife died at Cooling River," he said quietly. "Her father never knew what had happened. She couldn't have lived, they told us, under any circumstances. The old man and I grew very near to each other in our sorrow. He's a good man. I shall go to see him, the first thing, when I get back."

"Are you going back?"

"Yes, Phosie, very soon. All this happened years ago. I've schooled myself not to think about it. Time and courage heal our wounds, but I find I must live a life of action. I can't afford to brood. My salvation lies in hard work."

Phosie was half afraid of the question that rose to her lips, but she was impelled to ask it.

"Have you seen Jules Revell since—"

"Never!" he interrupted quickly. "But when I do—if I do—"

There was no need to complete the sentence. Phosie thought of the world of London, with its endless streets and myriad crowds. Would they ever meet?

From that night she was haunted by the shadow of a great terror. Frank Race's story had given it birth. It grew with the days—monstrous, vague, obscure.

CHAPTER XXVI

A TRIFLE, AND THE INTRODUCTION OF MR BOYTON

“PHOSIE, I want to speak to you. I have to ask a favour. It’s only a trifle, but it’s rather important.”

Phosie looked up from the floor, where she was kneeling in front of her wardrobe, as her husband entered the room.

It was the day after Frank Race’s story had been told. She was still haunted by its sad inconsequence, its lack of detail, and its revelation of the villainy of Jules Revell.

After a listless morning she was trying to occupy her mind with an inspection and re-arrangement of her clothes and trinkets, ably assisted by her daughter. She had finished her embroidery the previous night, after parting with Frank.

The bed was strewn with finery, and Jane, wearing a pink silk dressing-jacket over her pinafore and a wreath of artificial flowers on her head, was admiring herself in a long glass.

Walter sat down by the dressing-table, with masculine indifference to the prettiness surrounding him. He looked tired and pale, but as he had not returned home until midnight his wife concluded that that was the reason.

“What is it, dear?” she said, looking through a box of gloves with a thoughtful face. “Here’s a pair for you to play with, Jane.”

“Put ’em down,” said Jane. “I’m so busy.”

"Now do pay a little attention to what I am going to say, Phosie," began Walter. "As I told you just now it's only a trifle, but it's important."

"Yes, I'm listening," said Phosie.

He fidgeted with a scent-bottle on the dressing-table, twisting the glass stopper round and round, uncertain how to present his case. He was going to talk about money, and it was a little awkward in the face of the persistence with which he had refused to confide in his wife.

He wondered how she would take it. He was in no mood for reproaches and dreaded that her good-temper would be ruffled.

Phosie had too much character to be placid at any time, but then, again, he had never seen her really angry. For all his belief in the devotion of women, he had not lived so many years in the world without discovering that they could be mean, mercenary, wantonly extravagant.

The very room in which he sat usually suggested his wife's personal daintiness, but to-day it only gave an impression of the careless spending of money. He forgot that he was always urging her to spend, and that more than half the costly trifles she prized because they were his own gifts.

"Phosie, I want to borrow your money," he said at last, making a blunt plunge into his subject.

She laid aside the pile of gloves, got to her feet, and sat down on the edge of the bed, looking at him in a puzzled manner.

"Borrow my money?" she repeated. "How do you mean, Walter? It's Mr Revell's money you're speaking of, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," he answered impatiently.

"Do you want the capital, the whole of it, love? That seems so strange, because I am accustomed to getting the interest only."

"It isn't tied up, you know," he said quickly. "You are perfectly free to take possession of it all in a lump if you choose."

"I understand that," said Phosie. "Mr Faraday explained it to me when I went to his office the first time."

"You hardly get a pound a week, do you?" her husband continued. "Now, if I could show you a way to get a big interest on your capital—a thing that's bound to turn out well—"

"My dear boy, don't talk to me like a stockbroker!" interrupted Phosie, with a laugh. "Tell me simply what you want me to do, but remember that it is all I possess in my own right, and I consider myself responsible for Little Gus."

Walter Race chose to take this ill.

"Phosie, don't talk about your 'own right' and 'being responsible' for other people. I'm your husband, you know, and I don't think you need be afraid I shall shirk my duties."

"I'm sure you'll never desert me or your 'che-ild,'" said Phosie, laughing at his virtuously indignant tone, but instantly serious again when she saw he was really annoyed. "I wanted to ask you whether it isn't a little foolish, dear, to take one's money out of a safe investment on the mere chance of getting a dangerously high interest?"

"Good heavens, Phosie! If I'd got the money myself should I ask you?" he said, standing up and pushing his chair violently away. "But I haven't got it; I'm in a hole. I'm tied to Carl Stratton hand and foot."

"Ah!" cried Phosie.

She had always distrusted Carl Stratton. Her husband had assured her, some time back, that their business relations were about to end.

"I can't explain it all," he continued, walking up and down the room. "But I know there's a way out of the

difficulty. I swear I've got a chance to save myself, but I must have a little ready money. What do you say? Are you going to help me?"

He stopped abruptly in front of her. She looked up into his face perplexedly. How worn and ill he looked! The severity of his fine features was accentuated by dark lines under the eyes and round the puckered lips.

"Of course I will help you, Walter," said Phosie. "But I think I ought to consult Mr Faraday—"

"My dear Phosie," he interrupted pettishly, "all Faraday has to do is to obey your instructions."

"I should like to ask his advice," she went on, but again he interrupted her.

"So you consider him more trustworthy, more likely to look after your interest than I am? Perhaps you're right, but it isn't complimentary to me, is it?"

"Dear, you mistake me," said Phosie, gently. "You know I rely on you entirely. I will go to Mr Faraday to-morrow morning. I am sure it will be all right, but I wish—I do wish you had had nothing more to do with Carl Stratton, Walter."

"Oh, it's too late to talk about that," he said angrily, and went out of the room.

Phosie sat still, absently pleating a ribbon between her fingers, until Jane climbed on to the bed beside her.

"I wis' you'd speak to Biddy and Winkey, momma," she said. "They are very naughty, both of 'em."

Biddy and Winkey, the make-believe pet oyster and chicken of Phosie's childhood, had grown equally dear to Jane. Phosie had forgotten their imaginary existence for years, but the coming of her own child had revived the memories of her lonely life in Airy Street.

Jane found her mother a most interesting companion. They played together and told each other stories. Walter was not quite of their world, although they graciously permitted him to romp with them occasionally.

Mr Faraday received Phosie, when she called at his office on the following morning, with old-fashioned courtesy. He had been one of Henry Revell's few intimate friends.

Mr Faraday was a quiet, rather pompous man, with a naturally shrewd, alert expression in spite of the too, too solid flesh of his big, clean-shaven face. He spoke deliberately, weighing his words, turning them over in his mouth as it were, as if they possessed the flavour of good wine.

Having listened to Phosie's business with interest, he came to the conclusion that she was acting very foolishly, and told her so in a well-chosen, long sentence. She did not miss the implication.

"You see, I must be guided by my husband," she said.

"I quite understand your position," agreed Mr Faraday. "But the whole business gives one the impression of uncertainty, instability, a lack of the capacity to grasp the elemental facts of finance, if you will permit me to say so, on the part of Mr Race. He appears to have placed his affairs in the hands of a friend, and it is undoubtedly by the advice of this friend that your little fortune is also to be invested—in something, somewhere."

Mr Faraday shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I don't know whether Walter is still acting on this friend's advice," observed Phosie.

"You can take it as read, Mrs Race," answered Mr Faraday. "A friend of this description is like, if you will permit me to make use of the word, a limpet. A limpet. He sticks. I know these business friends of rich young men. I have come across any number of similar cases in the course of a long and, I hope you will pardon me for saying, singularly wide and varied experience of life. If it were not for being guilty of an absurd exaggeration I

should say that such friends begin their careers as the aforesaid limpets and invariably grow into social sharks."

Phosie looked at him helplessly.

"But I am afraid I have no alternative. I must do as my husband wishes."

"Of course it is entirely your own affair, my dear lady," said Mr Faraday. "But I think if I were to talk the matter over with Mr Race—"

"I have promised to settle it at once," said Phosie. "So I am afraid I must ask you to let me have the money as quickly as you can, Mr Faraday."

He smiled indulgently, for she spoke as if her little capital were in his waistcoat pocket. He was always indulgent to a pretty woman.

"I regret it," he said, in dismissing the subject, "and I fear that you will regret it too."

"I shall never regret pleasing Walter," she thought.

"Don't go, I beg, one moment!" exclaimed Mr Faraday, as Phosie rose, checking her with a stately wave of the hand. "I am anxious to introduce my partner to you, Mrs Race. We were talking about you only yesterday. I believe he was acquainted with some members of your family."

Phosie resumed her seat. She instantly thought of her father's family. It was hard to imagine any connection between the partner of this pompous gentleman and poor Eddy Moore, the Human Eel.

Mr Faraday touched his bell.

"Will you inform Mr Boyton that Mrs Race is here, and I shall be glad if he can spare us a few minutes," said Mr Faraday to the attendant clerk.

The clerk vanished, Mr Faraday talked about the salubrious weather for a minute or two, and then the door opened to admit Mr Boyton.

Mr Boyton was a thin, wiry, little man, the top of his sleek head hardly reaching to his partner's shoulder.

His bright eyes gleamed through gold-rimmed eye-glasses. His handshake was remarkably short and sharp.

He looked at Phosie very keenly, and deliberately took possession of her chair, which was in shadow, offering her another so that she faced the light. She was slightly embarrassed by the kind curiosity of his stare. Mr Faraday glanced from one to the other.

"Do you observe any resemblance, Boyton, to the friend of your youth?" he asked after a somewhat awkward pause.

"I do most decidedly!" answered Mr Boyton, who snapped out his words. "There's a wonderful—something, I don't know what it is—the expression of Mrs Race's face recalls the past. I think I knew your mother, Mrs Race."

"My mother!" cried Phosie.

She did not remember her mother, but she knew that her marriage with a poor acrobat had alienated the affection of her own people.

"I happened to mention, in casual conversation with Mr Boyton, that I believed your maiden name was Euphrosyne Moore," said Mr Faraday. "I really cannot recollect how the topic originated. Mr Boyton's attention was arrested by Euphrosyne as being a most uncommon Christian name—to speak more correctly, name bestowed upon a Christian. I myself had never met with another Euphrosyne, but it appeared that Mr Boyton's experience differed from mine. He had known a young lady of that name before he was articled to Freeman, Lidgate & Freeman. An excellent practice, by the way, Messrs Freeman, Lidgate & Freeman. I recollect old John Freeman—"

It is impossible to say how long Mr Faraday's soliloquy would have continued if his partner, still gazing at Phosie, had not interrupted him.

"We lived next door to each other, your mother's people and mine," he said. "We were practically brought up together. There were nine in our family, two in our neighbour's—your mother and your Uncle Joseph."

"I never heard of my Uncle Joseph," said Phosie. "I don't even know my mother's name before she was married."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Mr Faraday.

"It was Ridgeway—Euphrosyne Ridgeway," answered Mr Boyton. "Your Uncle was Joseph Ridgeway. He went to live in the south of France several years before I was articled."

"Joseph Ridgeway," repeated Phosie, thoughtfully.

She had heard that name before. It sounded strangely familiar. She had a hazy remembrance of forming the words on paper. She saw them, in her mind's eye, written on an envelope—Joseph Ridgeway—

Ah! It all came back to her in a flash of thought. Joseph Ridgeway! That was the name of one of Mr Revell's regular correspondents, the "Dear Joe" of numberless letters she had written to his dictation during her life in The Stroll. She had seen "Dear Herbert," his old friend from Surrey, a short time before Mr Revell's death, but "Dear Joe" had long ago passed out of her thoughts.

"My uncle!" she cried, and briefly told them of the strange coincidence.

"Good Heavens!" said Mr Faraday for the second time.

"He is still in France, but I believe he intends to return very shortly," said Mr Boyton. "I am told by mutual friends that he means to live in England. His business has greatly enlarged during the past five years."

"Have you mentioned the business, Mr Boyton?" asked Mr Faraday.

"He is a glove manufacturer," replied his partner. "A very successful man. His partner, Monsieur Mercier, will remain in France. Joseph Ridgeway is much older than I am. Your mother and I were more of an age. We were rather attached to each other at one time—at least, I hoped she was becoming attached to me. I was always attached to her. Well! Well! Young people are generally foolish. Your grandparents were a little too strict with Euphrosyne."

Phosie started. It was quite bewildering to suddenly realise the possession of so many new relations.

"Are my grandparents living?" she asked.

"Oh, no," replied Mr Boyton. "They are both dead."

"The common lot—regrettable, but inevitable," murmured Mr Faraday.

"Did you know my father?" asked Phosie, eagerly.

A peculiar smile wrinkled Mr Boyton's thin lips.

"I only saw your father once on the stage. He was—er—a very limber man."

"Yes," said Phosie, "he was known as the Human Eel."

"God bless my soul!" gasped Mr Faraday.

"My father was not a human freak," Phosie hastened to explain. "That was only his professional name. He was a contortionist."

"Very interesting, I am sure," murmured Mr Faraday, staring.

Phosie could not resist the temptation of adding to his knowledge of her father's work.

"You must not confuse contortion with leg-mania," she said gravely, "although they are generally studied at the same time. My father could do 'full bending' and 'posturing' with equal ease. It was as easy for him to hold his head in the small of his back as it is for most men to make a bow. Have you ever tried it, Mr Faraday?"

"Do you mean have I tried making a bow?" he asked, with a slight bend at what his tailor called his waist.

"No, bending backwards into a hoop," said Phosie. "It's much more difficult than it looks. So is high kicking. That's considered the ladies' branch of the business, you know."

Mr Faraday was obviously shocked. Phosie spared him any further details. She repeated her original question to Mr Boyton.

"Your father and I did not meet," he answered. "I never saw your mother after she left home to go on the stage. Her marriage, you probably know, was hardly—hardly—"

"I understand," said Phosie, helping him out of a difficult sentence. "My mother's family greatly disapproved of my poor father. But we loved him, she and I. I remember him with pride. He was gentle, good, chivalrous."

"I am ready to believe it," replied Mr Boyton. "Time, my dear Mrs Race, widens one's outlook and alters one's opinions. Let me see! I met my wife six months after I heard of your mother's marriage, and Mrs Boyton and I were married within the year."

"You must meet Mrs Boyton," put in Mr Faraday to Phosie. "Charming lady! One of the most spirited controversialists with whom I have ever had the pleasure of differing. Very strong views, to be sure."

Mr Boyton gave a little sigh.

"I shall be very happy to introduce you to my wife," he assured Phosie. "I don't want to lose sight of the daughter of my old friend. Would you like to communicate with your uncle, Mr Ridgeway? We have mutual friends who are always in touch with him."

"I would rather wait until he returns to England," said Phosie. "He may not care to know me."

"If once he meets you, my dear Mrs Race, such a

supposition would be simply ridiculous," said Mr Faraday, with laboured gallantry.

Phosie answered with a smile, and rose. She apologised for wasting so much of the partners' busy morning.

"Not at all!" said Mr Boyton, cordially. "I am delighted to meet you. It has reminded me of my boyhood. You must come to see us with your husband. Mrs Boyton will be very pleased, I'm sure."

"Permit me!" said Mr Faraday, opening the door. "Good-bye, my dear Mrs Race. I will attend to that little matter for you immediately. You may rely on me. Good morning."

Mr Boyton looked after her thoughtfully. She was very like the Euphrosyne of his youth. He sighed again, and returned slowly to his own room.

Mr Faraday sank into his easy-chair with a slightly-annoyed expression.

"The daughter of a Human Eel!" he said to himself. "What an extraordinary world this is! And she wanted me to see if I could put my head into the small of my own back! I've never been asked such a thing by a client in the whole course of my professional career."

Phosie hurried home, her mind full of the strange coincidence of Mr Revell's old correspondent proving to be her own uncle.

She was anxious to tell Walter that she had fulfilled her promise. It was a disappointment to find the house empty. Her husband had left no message. There were a couple of letters on the hall table. One was a note from Frank, saying he would not be in to luncheon. The other was an affectionate scrawl from Miss Sapio, announcing the date of the production of Hewett Addison's latest play—Phosie must keep herself free—why hadn't she popped in lately—how was darling Jane—poor dear old Quizzy had been very dicky with bronchitis, but was on the mend—what had become of Wally—love and kisses from her devoted Flo.

Phosie went into the dining-room and summoned Jane. She felt depressed and anxious. Walter had been very moody at breakfast, and she had no idea where he had gone. She found it impossible to shake off the haunting dread of her brother-in-law meeting Jules Revell.

Then she thought of her talk with Mr Boyton, and in the sudden entrance of Jane, with a hand outstretched on either side showing she was accompanied by Biddy and Winkey, she saw herself as a little child, all unconscious of the deep, confusing shadows which we call the realities of life.

Jane resembled her father too closely to personate for long the little Euphrosyne of Airy Street. She perched on her mother's knee, in her own serious way, and began to smooth the lines of troubled thought out of her brow with the palms of her hands, accompanied by murmuring little sounds of wordless love.

Phosie was soothed by her touch, strengthened by her soft voice, but she felt, at the same time, utterly lonely. It was a feeling that had swept over her now and again in the early days of her marriage.

What had she known of the man who was her husband? They were strangers to each other! What did she know of him after eight years?

She glanced round the familiar room. The decorations, the furniture, the books, the pictures, even the flowers on the table, were chosen to suit his tastes. The colour and style of her own dress, the arrangement of her hair, were designed to win his approval. Her whole life was entirely ruled according to his measure.

An observer of husbands and wives will understand the position when it is said that Walter always spoke of "my" house, and "my" servants, and "my" plans. He had yet to learn the value of the word "our."

Phosie was soon ashamed of her momentary aloofness. This was her own home. Her own dear home.

They sat down at the table side by side. Jane, standing up for a second on the bar of her high chair, peered into the dish. Its contents met with her highest approval, which she signified by folding her hands with a sigh of satisfaction, and fixing her eyes on her mother as she adapted her grace to the occasion:

“ For what I am ’bout to receive may the Lord make me truly thank you! ”

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE THEATRE

DURING the weeks that preceded the production of Hewett Addison's new play, after her interview with the lawyers, Phosie saw very little of her husband.

Although he had abandoned late breakfasts, always rising before nine, she had no opportunity of talking to him in the morning. He read the paper while he ate, and rarely spoke, leaving the conversation to his brother, Phosie and the child. He usually lunched at his club, dined four or five times a week with Carl Stratton, and was too tired or depressed at night to discuss any subject whatever.

Often and often, when his anxieties were forgotten in restless sleep, his wife would lie awake through the quiet hours, not unhappy, not afraid, but conscious of a gathering storm, wondering how he would meet it, and praying that she might be able to help him in her great love and loyalty.

Mr Revell's money—she always called it Mr Revell's money—was in Walter's hands, in spite of Mr Faraday's protests, and, having once given it up, Phosie dismissed all thoughts of it from her mind.

She was sorry to be obliged, for the time being, to reduce her weekly allowance to Little Gus, but fortunately his small salary amply supplied his simple needs. Gus hated spending money on himself. The horrible phantom of destitution was in his blood, for he had been born in want and misery, and all Phosie's affection could not set him free.

Little Gus was always afraid; afraid of poverty, afraid of illness, afraid of accidents, afraid of strangers. For a long time he was even afraid of Jane. Feeling her power, she used it like a kind autocrat, and he became her devoted slave.

On the morning of the production of Addison's play, when they were sitting at the breakfast-table, Walter announced that he would be unable to go to the theatre at night.

"Oh, Walter, how disappointing!" exclaimed Phosie. "It is such a great event for all Mr Addison's friends. You *must* go."

"Quite impossible!" he answered, irritably. "I'm obliged to see Stratton, and I can't get out of it."

"What an extraordinary way Stratton does his business," observed Frank Race, who was quartering an apple for Jane. "Can't you see him in the morning instead of at night?"

"He is out of town," said Walter. "But he expects to get back late this afternoon. I'm sorry, Phosie, but it can't be helped. You and Frank must go without me and give my seat to somebody else."

"I should like Uncle Bill to stop at home with me, an' mamma, an' mine Gussy, but I think I don't want daddy," said Jane, frankly.

Walter gave a laugh and rose from his chair.

"They'll all stop at home with you another day, babs," he said, and stooped to kiss her in passing.

"If you really can't go, Walter, I should like to take Gus," said Phosie, calling after him as he left the room.

"Very well, I don't care," he answered, shutting the door.

"Walter isn't well," said Frank.

"He makes me more and more anxious every day," said Phosie.

"I think daddy is on'y cross," Jane observed, eating her apple.

"Will your friend Gus appreciate a first night?" asked Frank, doubtfully.

"Dear Little Gus! He will enjoy going out with you and me," replied Phosie.

The play was produced at one of the most popular theatres in the Strand.

When the Race party arrived the house was already filling rapidly. Most of the people in the pit were standing up, recognising, or pretending to recognise, celebrities in the stalls. Dramatic critics shook hands with one another, or more frequently exchanged the silent greeting of a raised programme or a bored smile. There were a few pretty women and a great many pretty frocks.

Miss Sapio, in a rose-red cloak over white satin, sat in Hewett Addison's box, nodding, smiling, and kissing her hand to distant friends.

Addison himself was behind the scenes. He had long outgrown the desire to pace the Embankment, ready for a fatal plunge, on the first night of a new play, but he still felt too nervous to watch, in his own words, the jury assembling before the trial began.

Mrs Race's three seats were at the end of the third row from the back of the stalls. Phosie was simply dressed in dark green, with a small wreath of leaves in her hair. Frank thought how young and pretty she looked.

Tom Wainwright, the artist, who happened to be sitting two rows behind, made a sketch on the inner side of his programme of her graceful throat and soft coil of hair.

Little Gus's faithful eyes blinked at her through his spectacles. She had long personified to him the beauty and refinement of his narrow world. He could not appreciate many things; he had no taste for Art; literature was a sealed book; music spoke to him, but it was an indistinct, groping language. In Euphrosyne he found

the inspiration and the source of his mind's slow development.

"I wish Walter were here!" said Phosie more than once as the first act proceeded.

It was a comedy, not one of Addison's most original pieces of work, but rippling over with laughter all the same. The sensitive first-night audience responded to every line, every situation. There was a feeling of relief among the author's admirers, for they felt that his reputation was safe. He had once again justified their faith.

Phosie, who had been too anxious for her friend's success to really enjoy the first act, gave herself up wholly to the pleasure of the second. It was weeks and weeks since she had laughed so much.

Frank Race, to whom the author's half-mad absurdity—Hewett wrote with dignified madness, a madness of subtle lights and shades—did not so strongly appeal, nevertheless was moved to unusual appreciation.

He glanced to Phosie's eager profile, shadowy in the darkened auditorium, and was struck with its quaint resemblance to a water-colour drawing which hung in Walter's dressing-room. It had been Wainwright's wedding present, painted after the first visit of Walter's bride to the artist's home.

"A Spirit of Mirth" was written underneath in Wainwright's hand, but Frank had always regarded it, until that night, as a fanciful study for a picture of Ariel or Puck, for it possessed the delicacy of the first in form and the mockery of the second in expression. Now he saw that it was meant for Phosie; not a portrait for all who ran to read, but an artist's conception of her happy nature.

She was unconscious of her brother-in-law's amused discovery. Nothing was farther from her mind than Wainwright's water-colour, but Frank had the feeling of a boy who has found a hidden puzzle in a picture.

When the lights went up he would lose it again, but for the minute it was clearly, sharply drawn, and the wreath of leaves added to the illusion. It was no longer Phosie beside him. It was a sprite, a wild thing of the woods flown into a theatre. It was Ariel with those wide, long-fringed lashes—no, it was Puck with those laughing, curving lips.

The idle fancy pleased him for a second, after the fashion of idle fancies, but he found he was right at the end of the act. There was little resemblance, in the garish lights, between Phosie and the picture in her husband's room.

"I'm glad they've dropped the curtain," she exclaimed, leaning back in her seat. "I couldn't have laughed much more. As Jane says, it makes 'my cheeks to hurt.'"

"What a success! Lucky fellow!" said Frank Race.

He stood up and glanced round the stalls. Half the men went out between the acts, but Frank and Little Gus remained in their seats.

Phosie asked a question about American theatres. In the middle of his answer, when the stalls were refilling, Frank stopped short. His face changed, and he forgot to end his sentence. She looked at him in surprise.

"What is it?" she asked. "What are you looking at?"

There was no answer, and he did not notice her touch on his arm.

"Frank!"

She spoke to deaf ears. Puzzled and a little amused, Phosie seized the last second before the curtain rose to discover the cause of his unaccountable abstraction.

She stood up, followed his eyes, and saw—Jules Revell.

He was sitting at the end of the row in front of them, on the opposite side of the stalls. His eyes were bent

on his programme, and one hand was laid on his thick, dark moustache. In spite of this alteration in his appearance since last they met, for he had been clean-shaven in the old days, Phosie recognised him instantly. There was no mistaking the full, drooping eyelids; the heavy, but well-shaped nose; the thick hand, with short fingers.

He raised his head, as if he felt the attraction of their eyes, looked vaguely over the stalls, and saw them both.

Then the lights went out.

Phosie, frightened, agitated by what had passed, tried to read the expression of her brother-in-law's face. He was staring at the stage. She touched his hand. He started and bent over her.

"Frank! What is it? Whom did you see?" she whispered.

"It's nothing—nothing! Hush!" he answered in as low a tone.

She tried to recall her absorption in the play, tried to join in Gus's laughter, but it was impossible, for she guessed what was passing through the mind of the man on her other side, and felt the strain of his self-control.

She knew he was making up his mind what to do. Perhaps he was struggling to master his dormant passions of hate and revenge. This was her hope, her prayer, but she was powerless to help him.

The mimic stage, the puppets and their cunning showman, were forgotten.

"Frank!" Again she ventured to speak to him, and again he bent down, without looking at her.

"You're in trouble, dear. Stop with me—let me help you—"

"Stop with you!" he repeated and frowned. "What do you mean? Hush! We can't talk now."

What did he mean to do? Phosie asked herself the

question again and again. He must not meet Jules Revell. That was the one clear point in her troubled reasoning.

She did not doubt the power of her influence over Frank Race, if she could gain time. She knew that he was fond of her and believed in her judgment.

Her own repugnance to Jules Revell was unchanged, but she gave no thought to it. Frank did not know they had ever met. Her whispered entreaties only puzzled and annoyed him. He was too absorbed in his own affairs to notice her change of manner. She laughed no more, and the minutes dragged.

Frank Race could hardly keep still, although he forced himself to listen. Would this interminable play never end? Empty words—senseless noise—fools at play!

Directly the curtain fell and the lights flashed up he sprang to his feet.

"Gus will take you home, Phosie dear. I shall follow you later and explain—there's nothing the matter—good-bye!" he said.

She caught at his sleeve.

"Oh, Frank—a minute—"

"Later!" was all he answered, and shook her off.

Half the people in the audience were standing up. The actors were responding to applause. There was a cry of "Author!" much clapping, and a little booing from the gallery. All was noise and confusion.

Phosie looked across the stalls. She saw Jules Revell disappearing through the swing-door of an exit close to his seat. A few seconds later she caught a glimpse of Frank shouldering his way, with scant courtesy, towards another exit on his side of the theatre. Both doors opened on a vestibule leading by a flight of stairs into the entrance hall.

Jules Revell had perhaps half a minute's start. He

was the first man out of the theatre and seized upon the first cab.

Frank Race was close at his heels. A dozen eager hands pointed out the departing cab, a dozen men had seen the first gentleman get in, and a dozen whistles and calls summoned another cab for the second gentleman. Coins scattered. The hunter and his quarry had rushed out of the theatre and were gone before the remainder of the audience were fairly out of their seats.

Ten minutes later Phosie and Little Gus, unable to quicken their pace, slowly ascended the stairs into the entrance hall in the midst of a throng of people. Gus was bewildered by her haste and agitation, but followed blindly and pressed after her through the main doors of the theatre.

After a few minutes wasted in trying to secure a cab Phosie determined to walk down the Strand towards Charing Cross, hoping to meet with better success away from the crowd leaving the theatre.

The streets were very busy. They had reached the corner of Trafalgar Square before seeing an empty hansom. Every taxi was engaged.

"Gus, I want you to do something for me," she said, earnestly, before getting into the cab. "Go to our house as quickly as you can and see Walter. If he is not in, wait for him. Tell him to follow me at once. I am going to our old house in The Stroll. You can explain to Walter exactly where it is. Tell him there is nothing the matter, but he must come. When you have given the message, dear, go home yourself and sleep well. Good-night."

"Can't I do anything else, Phosie?" asked Gus, looking utterly miserable. "Shall I go with you—?"

"No! No! Do as I tell you. You can do nothing else. Good-night again. Be quick—go to Walter!"

She sprang into the cab, gave the address to the

driver, and waved her hand to Little Gus, who stood at the edge of the pavement for several minutes staring after her.

Then he remembered her words, pulled himself together, and turned his steps towards Temple Street.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HEWETT ADDISON'S POINT OF VIEW

HEWETT ADDISON entertained a small party of intimate friends to supper, after the performance, on the opening night of his new play.

The successful playwright lived in Plantagenet Court, where Phosie and her husband had spent the first years of their married life.

His chambers were in one of the old houses facing the river. There was only one light in the supper-room, hanging low over the table. The decorations and furniture were severely plain, for he disliked ornaments and cared little for pictures.

There were no flowers on the round table, which was of polished oak. The coarser foods were removed, dessert consisting of a single dish of perfect peaches and nectarines. Champagne had been offered to the guests, but Addison himself drank water.

He thought, as he looked at his friends, what an excellent cast they would make for a comedy.

There were the manager of the theatre where his play had been produced and his wife—the man middle-aged, fluent, affable, determined, with a somewhat battered, but still handsome face; the woman many years his junior, a pretty, delicate creature, with big, beautiful eyes, but dangerously shrewish lips.

An actor and his wife were the only other married couple. They were both playing in Addison's piece, the man being the old friend who was mentioned in

the tenth chapter of this story. He was slight, boyish, attractive, while the lady matched him as prettily as if they were a couple of china figures on a mantelpiece. They were not young, but they always played young parts; charming people, devoted to each other and their children. Time had apparently passed them by, and it was only on very close inspection that one saw his fingers had cracked the fair surface of the little china figures into innumerable wrinkles, brushing away the bloom of youth.

Two young men, Miss Sapio, and Mr Quizzical Quilter completed the party.

Of the young men, one was a popular novelist, and the other a musical critic. Quizzy, with a great expanse of white waistcoat and a buttonhole, struck the incongruous note which amused his host.

Miss Sapio had never looked more handsome. Her red cloak, thrown over the high back of her chair, formed an effective background for her white dress, splendid throat, and tawny hair.

She had cried with joy at Addison's triumph. It had amazed the self-possessed playwright, who took his success, as he would have taken failure, with unmoved serenity.

"Miss Sapio's congratulations would hardly give me satisfaction," observed the manager of the theatre, as they discussed Addison's play after supper. "Because she is so warm-hearted that she likes everybody to succeed."

"So do I!" exclaimed his wife, but the expression of her thin lips belied the words they spoke so sweetly.

"Well, I don't!" said the musical critic. "There are scores of men I know, scores of them, who ought to fail. It would do them good. They deserve it. There's nothing like a good failure, a howling failure, to show a man's true mettle."

"Do you mean it's a good 'ad.?' " asked Quizzy.

"No, I didn't mean that at all," said the critic, with a smile.

"Glad to hear it," answered Quizzy. "I don't hold with this new-fangled way of pushin' yourself down the public's throat. What's the good of makin' 'em swaller bad stuff? It's the newspapers we've got to thank for that."

"I don't know what you're driving at, Quizzy," said Addison.

"I'm drivin' at this ridiculous modern puffin' of the theatrical profession," said Quizzy, assuming a judicial air.

"Oh, you really mustn't run down the unfortunate profession, Mr Quilter," put in the youthful-looking actress. "It isn't our fault if we are always being interviewed and photographed. I suppose it's a case of supply and demand. The public wants that sort of thing, so we have to provide it."

"I doubt whether the intelligent public does want it," said the musical critic.

"Where do you find the intelligent public?" asked Addison.

"At your plays, Hughie," said Miss Sapio.

"Is there anything more absurd than all this talk about young actors and actresses in London?" said Quizzy, returning to his point. "They're not people of experience. They're Society people, that's what they are, with their motors and their pet dogs, and gettin' married to peers—it's sickenin', my boy! It's ruining the profession."

"It's generally supposed to be ruining the peerage," said the manager's wife, plaintively.

"I don't agree with you, madam," said Quizzy, hotly. "Our peerage can be trusted to take care of itself, thank God! but all that sort o' thing turns the heads of the young people in the business. They won't learn of their elders. They think themselves superior

to good old seasoned actors. The public and the players ought to keep to their own sides of the footlights. It's no good mixin' your drinks. They spoil each other."

Quizzzy's solemnity was greeted with the laughter he expected.

"I mean it all the same," he concluded.

"I agree with your point of view in many ways," said Addison. "There never was a fine actor yet who hadn't a big dash of the old strolling player in his composition. The methods, morals and manners of Theatre Royal, Back Drawing-Room, do not make for the greatness of dramatic art. We must have the passions on a big scale, even when they deign to dip under the lintels of our doors and sit at our ordinary dinner-tables."

"Is that a plea for melodrama, Mr Addison?" said the manager's wife again plaintively.

"No, Mrs Fountain, it's a protest, from Quizzzy's point of view, against confusing the actor with his part."

"I can't say I see the connection," said the novelist.

"I suppose he means that if we have only kid-glove actors we shall have only kid-glove plays," said the musical critic.

The theatrical manager laughed.

"That idea leads the way, if we are to be logical, to a man committing murder before he can act Macbeth, and only a consumptive woman being cast for La Dame Aux Camelias."

"That's a weak argument, Fountain, for this reason," replied Addison, rivalling Quizzzy in solemnity. "It would mean so much specialising in theatrical ranks, and no perfect actor is a specialist."

"Can you mention one in London who is not?" asked the manager.

"I said perfect, not popular," said Addison.

Miss Sapio, who had been unusually silent all the

evening, here broke in, looking thoughtfully at her host.

"I want to get at this point of view you're talking about, Hughie," she said. "Do you mean that experience is everything and intuition of little good?"

"For an actress?" he asked.

"For a human being, never mind the actress," she said quickly.

"Yes," said Addison. "But I mean something beyond material, practical experience. That teaches, but not the best lessons. We have to learn from the two old masters, Joy and Pain. We love the first. We loathe the second. A day comes when we are able to see that our debt of gratitude to them both is exactly equal."

Miss Sapio did not answer. Addison rose from the table with a word of apology.

"Forgive me for being so abominably commonplace," he said, "but I've had a play out, you know, and my brain is taking a rest. Now, shall we sit round the fire?"

Miss Sapio was the last of his guests to depart. Addison, returning to the room after seeing the others out, found her leaning an elbow on the mantelpiece, with one foot on the fender, looking down into the fire.

"Oh, how sleepy I am!" he exclaimed, stopping at the table to pour a very small quantity of whisky into a glass, filled up with soda-water. "Have a drink, Flo?"

She looked up with a tiny start.

"No, thanks, Hughie. Throw over my cloak, old man. I must do a toddle, as Quizzy says."

Addison emptied his glass, and gathered up the yards of rose-red silk, searching for the top of the cloak.

"What poor little dolls those women looked compared with you, my dear Florence," he said absently, still handling the yards of silk.

"That's only from your point of view," said Miss Sapio, going to his assistance. "Millie Fountain is almost young enough to be my daughter, and the other one is sweetly pretty."

He held up the cloak and she slipped it on to her shoulders.

"You're not sweetly pretty, you know," he said. "You're very beautiful."

Miss Sapio laughed, and Addison dropped his hold of the cloak. She held out her hands with an effusion which would have been affected, or provocative, in any other woman. In her it was absolutely sincere and unpremeditated.

"Good-night, Hughie! I can't speak of your success for it would make me cry again, but you know what I think about it."

"I know," said Addison.

He stood immovable for several seconds, looking at her thoughtfully, critically, keenly.

"Are you angry with me about something, Hughie?" she asked, as simply as a girl.

Addison shook his head slowly.

"On the contrary, I am absolutely satisfied with you, Flo."

"Well, that's something!" she said, and laughed a little awkwardly.

"Absolutely," he repeated.

She fastened the golden clasp of the cloak and stooped to swirl her long train over one arm, then she looked up and saw he was still in the same attitude; his hands on his hips, his mouth a little compressed, his brows drawn together. She was about to speak, but he held up his finger for silence, and spoke himself, in a steady, deliberate voice.

"Flo, will you marry me?"

"Ah!"

It was a little sharp exclamation that broke from her

lips, and all the colour faded out of her face. She looked, for a second, as if she were going to faint. Addison took a step nearer.

"My dear Flo!"

Miss Sapio laid her hand on the mantelpiece. She was trembling from head to foot.

"It can't be!" she said in a low, uncertain voice.

"It can't be. It's impossible."

"Why is it impossible?"

"So many, many reasons."

Hewett Addison pushed a couple of chairs close to the hearth, stirred the fire, and lighted a cigarette.

"Sit down beside me," he said. "You must tell me the reasons."

She dropped into one of the chairs, unfastened the clasp of the cloak again, as if it were choking her, and leaned back with closed eyes. Addison poured out a glass of water and put it into her hand without a word. She raised it to her lips for a second, and then he dipped his fingers and drew them across her brow. She smiled faintly at that, and dabbed her forehead with her handkerchief.

A rose she had worn in her dress had been torn by the fastening of the cloak, and its red petals now dropped on to her white dress. Addison picked up several of them, clinging together, and threw them into the fire.

His ruling passion made him remember every trifling incident of this eventful night. Years afterwards, in one of his serious plays, a man dipped two fingers into a glass of water and saved a woman from fainting with one light touch, afterwards picking up some rose petals and carefully burning them, but the critics told him that both these things were unnatural and inartistic.

Miss Sapio recovered and pulled herself up in the chair. Hewett smiled encouragement.

"Well?" he said, taking up the conversation where they had left off.

She rested her chin on her hand, looking at him.

"Well?" he repeated after a pause.

"Oh, Hughie, you have forgotten my age! You know nothing of my past life—"

"One thing at a time," he interrupted quickly. "I think I can guess your age. I am not a boy, you know, but in my thirty-ninth year."

"But I am—over thirty-nine."

Addison nodded calmly.

"Very well! Let it go at that."

"I have lived a very hard, very strange life," she went on, "but I never wanted to change the past till to-night. You spoke the truth about joy and pain a while ago. I have known both. I have known the heights and the depths of life. Do you realise what I mean? Do you think you know me?"

"I am sure of it," said Addison, in the same unmoved voice.

There was another long pause.

"It is only right to tell you I have been married before," she said in a very low voice. "It was many years ago. Very few people remember it, but at the time—the other man being so well known, although it was only a bubble reputation—no one in the world knows all the story, but if you like—"

Addison's raised hand stopped her.

"Are you legally free to marry again?" he said.

"Yes."

"Is your husband alive?"

"He died, I was told, about four years ago."

"There is no one else to stand between us?"

"Oh, Hughie—no! No!"

Addison, who had not looked at her as he asked these questions, suddenly turned in his chair and laid his hands on her shoulders.

"Will you have me, Flo? I'm an odd, eccentric little beggar—you know that—full of all sorts of mad

ideas and whimsical nonsense. I should be wretched with an ordinary wife."

"What do you mean by an ordinary wife?" she asked.

"Oh, you know, the usual thing. A wife who would want an 'At Home' day, and stiff dinner-parties, and have stacks of relatives. I don't like conventional women, and I don't like girls, except to look at."

"I thought, once, you had fallen in love with Phosie, before she married Walter Race," said Miss Sapio.

"No, not for a minute," he replied. "I called her a wave of delight from God, and so she is, but I have always loved you."

"In spite of everything, Hughie?"

"Because of everything! If I would have you changed I should not be the man I am, for I know that tolerance and mercy, such as yours, are cheaply bought at any price. Your life has made you what you are—kind, great-hearted, pitiful. I said just now I had always loved you, Flo, but that isn't true. My love is the flower of deep-rooted admiration and honour."

He bent towards her, his hands clasped on the arm of his chair. She suddenly dropped her head and kissed them tenderly. They were wet with her tears.

"Oh, you mustn't do that!" he exclaimed, with a change at last in his quiet voice. "I couldn't bear it from any woman. You mustn't kiss my hands. Dearest Flo, you humble me."

"I love you with all my heart," she said.

It was several minutes before Hewett recovered his self-possession. Miss Sapio had never seen him so moved, and she understood, watching his emotion, something of the loneliness of his highly-strung but restrained nature.

He had told her, often and often, of the strange, fanciful creations of his brain, and in this rare moment of revelation she was thrilled by the sense of his de-

pendence on her sympathy. The strength of his character had raised her to new heights; his weakness filled her with a poignant feeling of pride, and pain, and gratitude.

From that hour her life, after all its storm and tragedy, was dedicated to him—the shelter of his home, the protection of his solitude, the perfection of his work.

"We will be married soon," said Hewett, when they parted that night.

"Just as you please," answered Miss Sapio.

They had both slipped back into the commonplace. Hewett stood on the kerb, bare-headed, having put her into a taxi.

"I want a holiday now the play is produced," he went on. "Shall we say next week, Flo?"

"To be married? Oh, my dear boy!"

"Why not?" said Addison.

"Yes, why not?" echoed Miss Sapio, with a laugh.

"When shall I see you again?"

"To-morrow. We'll settle it then. Good-night, Flo!"

"Good-night, dear Hughie!"

CHAPTER XXIX

ONCE AGAIN IN THE STROLL

WHEN Euphrosyne drove away from Little Gus, in pursuit of Frank Race, it was some time before she was sufficiently calm to realise her position.

The streets were flooded with the gay streams pouring from theatre and music-hall. She saw by a clock in the Haymarket that it was half-past eleven.

The streams widened at Piccadilly Circus into a rushing river of noise, colour and confusion. Now and again, in the eddies and rapids, a figure would swim out of the troubled waters under the lee of Phosie's craft—for hansoms are the old gondolas of old London—to hold her attention for a fleeting minute.

Once it was a vision of a man and girl in an electric brougham, holding hands and looking into each other's eyes, as much alone in their happy world as if they had been drifting down a real stream in their own canoe. Once it was the expression of a woman, flashing an evil smile to answering eyes from lips of vivid red; once it was the face of a boy shouting an evening paper, insolent, cunning, old in knowledge of the streets; once it was the wondering, innocent stare of a little child, clutched in the arms of a nervous mother scuttling across the road.

Her husband was always in Phosie's mind, for she knew how much he loved his brother. It was for his, Walter's, sake she had determined to throw herself between these men. Her fear and abhorrence of Jules Revell had never been as great as it was at that minute.

As she drew nearer and nearer to The Stroll, passing one familiar landmark after another, this inward feeling increased, but outwardly she was calm and alert, and even in her dread it was characteristic of Phosie that she was not wholly oblivious of a humorous side to the situation—the boastful Jules running away, Frank chasing Jules, Phosie chasing Frank, and, in all probability, Walter chasing Phosie!

She leaned eagerly forward in the cab as they turned out of Hammersmith Broadway into the quiet, shady Stroll.

In Mr Revell's days there had been a few ineffectual gas lamps placed at far intervals at the edge of the pavement, but these had long been superseded by big arc lights down the middle of the road.

There was a bright moon, and the shadows of the still leafy plane trees flickered on the ground.

The driver slackened speed, and Phosie thrust open the little trap-door over her head, telling him where to stop.

She sprang out almost before the wheels were still, paid the fare, and ran up the well-remembered steps to the front door.

Then she paused irresolute. The upper windows of the house were dark, but there was a light in the hall. She could see this by peering through the thick pattern of glass in the panels of the door.

The driver turned his cab slowly and rattled away. The sound of the horse's hoofs were like muffled drum taps on the soft road.

Phosie was full of doubt. Perhaps she had come on a fool's errand. What if Jules had not returned? Even if she saw him, how could she explain her visit at such an hour to his house? Would Frank Race brook her interference? Would she have to tell the truth to Jules Revell's wife? What was it right to do? What was it wise to do?

She knocked at the door decisively and waited.

The street was as silent as on the night when she had slept under the lilac bush with Little Gus, years and years ago.

Again she put her face close to the thick glass panel, peering through.

Suddenly there was a sound from within—men's voices, hard and hoarse—an indistinct crash—a faint scream.

Phosie hammered on the door. A shadow flitted against the glass panel.

The door opened and she was confronted by a woman with a quantity of flaxen, dishevelled hair, and a white, haggard face. She wore an old lavender silk tea-gown with long, worn ruffles at the elbow sleeves and the collar fastened with a big safety pin, while her feet were thrust into velvet slippers, trodden down at heel, bursting out at the sides. Round her waist was a draggled sash of discoloured ribbon.

For a second she and Phosie stared at each other in silence. Then the recognition was mutual.

"Lily!" cried the one, throwing her arms round her old friend's neck.

"It's Phosie! Come in, Phosie! For God's sake, come in! My husband—!" gasped the other.

She dragged Phosie into the narrow hall and shut the door. It was hot and ill-ventilated. There was a strong smell of tobacco and cooking as they went downstairs, and a child was wailing fretfully somewhere in the distance.

Mrs Revell, once the pretty, pink-and-white Lily Parlow, led the way to the breakfast-room, clutching Phosie's fingers in her own hot, shaking hand.

Here the gas was flaring, and Phosie, as she entered, was dazzled by the sudden brightness.

A table, spread for supper, had evidently been pushed hastily against the wall, for there was a smashed glass

on the floor and a bottle of wine had been knocked over, staining the cloth red.

Frank Race, still in his overcoat, but with his white shirt front crumpled and his collar torn, was kneeling on the ground over Jules Revell, trying to stanch a flow of blood from his right temple. Revell's eyes were closed, and his breath came through his lips in irregular, loud puffs. The blood was in a little pool upon the floor, and trickled from his hair, which Race had pushed back from his forehead.

Mrs Revell clung to Phosie with both hands, panting and quivering.

"He's killed him—that man's killed my husband—they came in together and quarrelled—I heard them—and they had a fight—he's killed Jules—" She left off speaking and began to sob, and then scream, pointing at Frank Race and clutching at her own breast with aimless, fierce passion, horrible to see.

Phosie gripped her hands and held them still. There was a second's struggle between them, and then the poor, frightened creature was mastered. Her voice sank into a moan. She stared at Phosie helplessly, choking back her tears. Phosie released her hands and laid her own fingers on the other woman's lips, caressingly but firmly, soothing her into silence.

"You must go for a doctor at once," she said. "Do you understand me? Don't waste an instant! You will know where to go. Leave your husband to us. He has only fainted. Don't look at him again—do as I tell you. Go!"

Lily Revell obeyed. They heard her stumbling up the stairs, opening the front door, closing it behind her, running down the street.

Phosie caught up a napkin from the table and knelt down. She and Frank Race looked at each other over the body of Jules Revell.

"I struck him and he fell against the iron fender," said Frank.

Phosie laid Jules's head flat upon the ground. She too tried to stanch the wound.

"You must go away, Frank, before his wife returns with the doctor," she said.

"No!" exclaimed Frank.

"You must!" she answered, and her voice was calm and firm. "You must think of your own safety—if he is badly hurt—what can you do here? I implore you, Frank! Hide yourself. Write me to-morrow and I will let you know what has happened. Quick! For my sake—for Walter's sake!"

As she spoke she wiped her fingers—it sickened the man who watched her to see the streaks of red on her white arms—took out her purse, opened it, and pressed the money it contained into his unwilling hands.

"Phosie! I can't!" he exclaimed. "I'm not a coward. I'll face it out."

"I implore you, Frank!" she said again, in the most earnest tones of her appealing voice. "It must be kept a secret—this horrible thing—not only for our sake but for the sake of his wife. Do you want to break her heart? Do you want to disgrace Walter?"

"I can't leave you alone," he said.

"What can you do here?" she said for the second time. "You have struck down your enemy. There was murder in your heart. God forgive you both. Oh, my brother! My brother!"

He was conquered by her intensity. Not for the first time in her life, in that same room, her moral strength was triumphant, and when she raised her head for a word of farewell Frank Race was gone.

She bent over the injured man, the man who had tried to wrong her so cruelly, with hand and eye and every sense intent upon her work. Alone with Jules Revell, doing everything that was possible in her ignorance, he was no longer repugnant to her. She forgave him in her pity, grieved for his wasted youth, and thought

of him once more with the kindness of their first friendship.

She realised that her hate had recoiled upon herself, darkening the brightness of her happy nature.

"I will hate no more," she said.

She saw that Jules was greatly changed. He had been no match for Frank Race. His youth was passing, and with it the freshness of colour and agility of movement which had been his only attraction. The thick moustache concealed the ugly mouth, but as he lay upon the floor, in all the revelation of unconsciousness, the deterioration of his face and figure was startlingly apparent, but Phosie did not think of it.

Her attention was fixed upon the street, straining her ears for the return of Lily Revell with a doctor. She was vaguely distressed the while by the distant crying of the child, wondering whether it was Lily's child, and longing to comfort it.

The familiarity of the room grew upon her. She thought of Mr Revell, of Gus, of herself. The ghosts of old days crept out of the shadows, brushed against her in the silence, took form and faded in her quickened brain.

Phosie sprang up at the sound of hurried feet on the steps outside the house, with an exclamation of intense relief. They seemed to have been alone, she and the inert figure on the floor, for an hour. In reality it was less than ten minutes.

Lily Revell ran downstairs, talking incoherently, closely followed by a neighbouring doctor. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, capable, prompt, silent. The impression he gave as he stooped over Jules was of stern strength and professional reticence.

After one swift glance at the two women it was Phosie, not the wife, whom he chose to help him. Lily sat down on the edge of a chair, rubbing her hands aimlessly over one another, ill at the sight of blood, shaking and crying.

"This was caused by a fall, I understand? He was apparently seized with sudden faintness," the doctor said to Phosie.

She knew that Jules's wife must have told this story. Lily Revell, in spite of her agitation, had spoken no word of the fight. She was governed by knowledge of the man whom she had married. Without knowing the cause of his quarrel with Frank Race she was ready to believe the worst of her husband. He deserved his punishment, but for her own sake, for the sake of her child, she must shield him from disgrace.

When Jules Revell returned to consciousness his eyes opened on Euphrosyne's face. He gave a groan of pain, and showed no surprise at her presence or remembrance of what had passed.

Then he tried to smile at her. She was looking at him so kindly. A vague feeling of remorse troubled his dazed mind. Was it years ago—or was it yesterday—that Phosie had gone out of his life? It was a pity, and he was to blame—yes, he felt sure he was to blame—

"If I've been brutal to you, forgive me, Phosie," he said weakly.

"I forgive you, Jules," she answered.

He touched her hand. His touch had always been warm, as eloquent without words as the glance of his full brown eyes, but now it was cold and feeble. For the first time in her life she felt no inward shrinking from him. His heavy eyelids drooped. He was satisfied.

Phosie looked earnestly at the doctor.

"Will he die?" she said.

The doctor allowed a smile to break through his professional manner.

"There is not the slightest danger of that," he replied.

Half an hour later, when she had helped Lily to make up a bed for her husband in the room where he had fallen, and the doctor had put him to rest, Phosie opened the door to Walter Race.

She had anxiously awaited his coming and greeted him with the long-repressed excitement of such an eventful night.

"Dearest!" she exclaimed, and then again, "Dearest!"

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" he said, as she drew him into the hall. "I didn't get home till nearly twelve o'clock, and there was Gus waiting for me with this amazing story about you and Frank. Have you gone out of your senses? What are you doing here?"

Phosie's hand dropped from his arm. He was angry, nervous, unlike himself, and went on speaking hurriedly, emphasising his words with peculiar jerky movements of both hands.

"I repeat, what are you doing here? Haven't I troubles enough without this? You don't know what's happened! I've got something to tell you. It's bad news, Phosie! It's awfully bad news. You ought to have been at home. I didn't expect this! I know who lives here—Jules Revell. He was in love with you. You told me so yourself. What have you got to do with him? Where is Frank?"

He stopped for a second, biting his under lip. She tried to speak, but he went on again, in the same voice, with the same gestures:

"I tell you I've got bad news. You don't care! I wanted you when I got home. You don't know how I wanted you! You were not there. What do you mean by it? What's this man got to do with us? If I thought you had ever cared for him—"

"Stop! You must not speak to me like this!" she interrupted with sudden passion. "You forget yourself. I refuse to listen."

He stared at her wretchedly. Her flash of anger was gone. She went very close to him and spoke softly, her arm stealing round his neck.

"I came here for the sake of your brother. Why are

you angry with me, Walter? You are so fond of Frank and I found he was in danger. I thought I could help him. I will tell you all about it—everything—when we get home. Wait for me, dear.”

She ran upstairs to Lily, who was rocking her little boy in her arms, wrapped in an old flannel dressing-gown. He was a dark-haired, fretful little creature, with great liquid eyes like his father. Phosie re-made his untidy bed, opened the window, and finally crooned him to sleep, walking up and down the room.

Then she persuaded Lily to eat and drink, for she was exhausted, before they arranged the room where Jules lay.

Lily Revell, who had lost all her girlish affectation, did not thank her in many words, but she hung round her neck at parting.

“I don’t know what made you come to-night, Phosie,” she said. “But it doesn’t matter, for I don’t want to know. You understand my husband. You’ve lived in the house with him. There’s only one way to be happy with Jules—not to care—and I’m learning my lesson. Good-night, Phosie. Good-bye. I should have died without you.”

Euphrosyne found her husband pacing backwards and forwards in the dark hall.

“Shall we go home?” he asked when she appeared. “Are you ready to hear the bad news? Can you bear any more to-night, Phosie?”

“I am ready, love,” she answered.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW PHOSIE HEARD THE NEWS

MR & MRS RACE had returned to their house in Temple Street.

On entering they had gone into the gloomy little study. Walter had switched on the electric light which hung over the writing-table. The corners of the room were in shadow. Although the curtains were closely drawn it was impossible to shut out the cold, lonely hour of the night.

Phosie, still wrapped in her cloak, was sitting in a big chair, stooping forward, silently watching her husband.

Walter Race walked backwards and forwards from the fireplace to the door, his head hanging down, his hands clenched, his handsome face like a set mask of bitterness and rage.

Phosie was quelled, for the moment frightened, by a sense of physical force. His low, hoarse voice; the swing of his big shoulders as he turned; the dark flush which had succeeded his paleness; his violence of language—everything about him made her conscious of her own weakness. For the first few minutes she was helpless, trembling, every nerve jarred; had she allowed herself to speak it would have been a prayer for a minute's peace—the wailing appeal of the woman who is swept into the buffeting currents of a man's stronger nature and feels herself at his mercy.

If Walter had had any conception of his wife's emotions he would have been amazed. He only saw that she was very pale, and her beautiful eyes, fixed on his face, were wide and glassy.

It was not until his storm of anger was spent that she leaned back in her chair with a deep sigh and allowed her taut muscles to relax. She was afraid of him still, and suddenly thought of his brother kneeling beside Jules Revell with blood on his hands.

It is a shuddering minute when a sensitive being like Euphrosyne realises the terrible primeval passions in men.

Walter sat down beside her, taking her hand.

"Do you believe what has happened, Phosie?" he said, gradually recovering his self-control. "Do you understand? We are ruined! Ruined!"

"Yes, I understand," she answered, faintly.

"I've been with Carl Stratton all the evening," he went on. "He's in the same boat, thank God! What a fool I've been! What a damned fool! I've trusted him—relied on his judgment—one thing after another—"

"Walter! You're hurting me," she interrupted, trying to draw her hand out of his grasp.

He unlocked his fingers instantly, but they had left their mark on her wrist.

"Your money has gone too," he continued, with a short, harsh laugh; "I wonder if you take it in, Phosie. We shall have to sell up—all this house—it isn't ours any longer. I must go to my brothers, I suppose. Good Lord! How John will bully and Edmund preach. I wonder whether Frank will lend a hand? I hate asking Leo. Every penny belongs to his wife."

Phosie rubbed her wrist and did not answer. He got up and paced the floor again for several minutes.

"Well, I've got my thrashing in life, and I deserve it!" he said.

She was still silent, but her expression changed. She looked at him tenderly, sorrowfully, no longer afraid.

"If I didn't feel so wretchedly ill—" he began, and sat down once more at her side.

"What is the matter with you, Walter?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "First I burn, and then I freeze. Every bone in my body aches."

Phosie laid her hand on his forehead, but he jerked it away.

"Why did you let me have your money, Phosie?" he said. "I promised to double it, didn't I? I wish you'd taken Faraday's advice. He was a better judge of your husband than you are, my dear."

"Walter! Walter!"

She pulled herself to her feet, stooped to kiss him, and went out of the room.

He heard her running lightly downstairs to the basement. In a few minutes she returned, carrying some paper and a bundle of firewood in her arms.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Light a fire in our room," said Phosie. "It is so cold and cheerless for you. My poor darling!"

He followed her slowly with dragging steps.

She was holding the door open when he reached the second floor, with one finger on her lips.

"We mustn't wake Jane," she whispered.

She had already turned on the electric light and wheeled a chair, piled with cushions, up to the hearth.

Walter was strangely subdued. He sat down in silence.

Phosie threw off her cloak, knelt on the hearthrug and quickly built up the fire which had burned out in their absence.

She had a skilful, light hand. The paper flared and faded; the wood crackled; a little spurt of flame leapt forth and frolicked in the air for a second, vanished, and came again, flickering but strong. A spiral of grey smoke puffed out and vainly tried to smother the dancing jets. A dull red glow slowly crept over the black hollow beneath the flare.

The fire was alight, reflex of the endless fires kindled

in the homes of men; spiritual symbol in its upward leap of living flame; eternal proof of the warmth of love.

Phosie, still kneeling in front of him, put her hand on Walter's knee with a gentle, fond smile.

"It will be all right, dear," she said. "You mustn't despair—we have each other—look! what a bright hearth!"

"Phosie!"

Her husband, with a low, strange cry of weakness—gratitude—remorse—bent forward, took her hands and crushed them against his lips.

CHAPTER XXXI

LIGHT AND SHADOW ON THE WALL

THERE are times when the world of action, work, and pleasure seems to stand still.

All a man's interest and hope become centred in himself, but even then it is a vague interest and a faint hope. One is, at such a period, both a supreme egoist and fitfully indifferent to his own fate.

He wants to live, for life has never seemed so dear, but lying as he does in the shadow of death his spirit is as courageous as his body is weak.

All his emotions are contradictory. New thoughts of transcendent loveliness pass through his mind, but the merest trifles agitate and trouble him. He is haunted by grotesque dreams. For an hour he is patiently brave, but the next he is wretchedly despondent. He realises his own danger, but not clearly. The days and weeks are merged together. Sometimes the sunshine gleams into his quiet room through drawn blinds, and sometimes there is the soft light of shaded lamps. This is the only difference he knows between day and night.

Walter Race, towards the end of October, drifted into a languid world such as this. His strength was drained by rheumatic fever quickly following the nervous breakdown caused by his financial disaster.

He hung between life and death, and his wife, the shadow of Euphrosyne, watched his struggle with a soul which never doubted the issue. She knew that he would live. In the darkest hour she was not afraid.

She felt as if his faint heart were fluttering in her own breast and the spirit within her—strong, undaunted—kept it beating.

Walter, forgetful of everybody else, never lost consciousness of her presence. When the danger was over he thought, in his foolish weakness, that she had literally kept her hand on his forehead, cool and soft, through all the uncounted hours of his delirium.

He pondered over this, watching the light and shadow on the wall of the room.

All time had resolved itself into these shifting lights and shadows on the wall. His eyes perpetually rested there. The plain green paper was singularly restful, and there was a small vase of flowers on a wooden bracket which Phosie tended every day. He was never tired of looking at the blossoms and leaves.

Walter knew that he was not lying in his bedroom in Temple Street, for they had moved into furnished lodgings in Belton Terrace, the first floor of the house where Little Gus still lived, shortly before his illness.

It seemed a long, long time ago. He had a hazy recollection of miserable days. There had been a violent quarrel with Carl Stratton, harassing interviews with men to whom he owed money, lengthy disputes with an officious stranger who was taking an inventory of the contents of the house—gradually all these things returned to his mind, but he was still too feeble to ask questions.

Nothing surprised him. Nothing affected him.

When Phosie was in the room he tried to talk to her, when she was absent he watched the lights and shadows on the wall—listening, yearning for her return.

Jane was greatly puzzled at first by the change in her life. She no longer had a nurse. Her home had dwindled down into three rooms. It was an amazing thing to see her mother cook the dinner on a gas-stove in a little, chilly scullery at the end of a passage.

She soon discovered that Belton Terrace was a very interesting place.

There had been no hawkers in Temple Street, and musicians of all kinds had been strictly prohibited. It was also an advantage to live in the same house as Little Gus, who was ready to play "Beggar my neighbour" or "Old Maid"—Jane was preternaturally sharp at learning cards—immediately after breakfast or till the very last minute before bedtime.

She frequently crept into her father's room and stood beside him, her little, thoughtful face so wonderfully like the face on the pillow.

"Are you gettin' better, daddy?" was her usual question.

"Yes, darling, I am getting better," he would answer, perhaps putting out a hand to touch a wave of dark hair as she leaned forward, peering curiously into his hollow eyes.

Sometimes she would carry the cat of the house into the room, or one of her toys, to entertain him, but she generally preferred the society of her mother.

"Daddy looks so thin, an' so long, an' so miser'ble in bed," she explained to Phosie.

Little Gus was another of Walter's regular visitors, shuffling in and out of the room in an old pair of slippers, meaning well, but generally the bearer of depressing scraps of information out of the newspapers regarding fires, railway accidents, or deaths from starvation. The patient listened in silence to Gus's disjointed sentences, grateful for his kind intention, but more grateful still when the door closed behind him.

Walter was really glad to see Hewett Addison, whose shadow fell one day across the green wall. Hewett was the bearer of a basket of flowers and a huge bunch of hothouse grapes, with a letter, from Miss Sapio.

"Flo is in Paris," he explained. "I believe she's buying clothes for her wedding."

"Is Miss Sapio going to be married?" asked Walter, with a glance of surprise at Phosie.

"Oh, yes," said Hewett Addison in his quiet way. "I believe she will be very happy, though 'marriages is always risky,' as the girl observed who united herself to a soldier after walking out with him once."

"I am so glad! I congratulate you with all my heart!" said Phosie, putting out her hand to Hewett.

"What! Are you the fortunate man?" asked Walter in his feeble voice,

"Yes, so I am told," said Hewett. "You must come to our wedding, my dear Race. You must get well on purpose. We intended to be married three weeks ago, but Miss Sapio got a splendid offer for a short tour. If you knew as much about the theatrical profession as I do you would not be at all surprised at her postponing it on that account. Every actress seems to be able to get a husband, but it's a much more difficult business to get an engagement."

"Not if an actress has a kind and good friend who happens to be a great man," said Phosie, looking at Addison with an expression of gratitude that her husband did not then understand.

"Perhaps you're right, but I don't agree with you," answered Hewett, ignoring her meaning.

To be thanked for anything he had done was one of the few things in the world which made him irritable.

When his brother John appeared upon the scene, the day following Addison's visit, Walter Race was both agitated and pleased.

He knew that John and Edmund were very angry, righteously angry. The members of the family had escaped many dangers, but they had never before approached the perils of bankruptcy. Even their black sheep, Frank, was not guilty of a crime like that. The fox-hunting brother, Leo, shared their indignation, but he was too good-natured to vent it on Walter's wife.

John and Edmund, on the contrary, were inclined to blame Phosie for every imprudent action of their brother's life, not only after, but before, he married her.

It was in this spirit that Mr John Race paid his first visit to Belton Terrace, accompanied by Edmund. They were totally unprepared for the reception Phosie gave them. It was so affectionate, so frank, but so independent that the two brothers found themselves in the position of valued friends of whom nothing was asked but the sympathy they had—not—come to offer.

The small rooms, so sparsely but prettily furnished; the appearance of the child; the care expended on the simple meal to which they were invited; the evidence of careful, orderly nursing of the invalid; everything they saw added to their surprise, pleasure and discomfiture.

John, being thick-skinned, accepted the situation much more easily than Edmund. The eight years of the family's studied neglect of Walter's wife was not a pleasant reflection, but under all his pomposity and pride there was the English passion for justice in Mr John Race, and he honestly confessed to himself he had not been just to Euphrosyne.

He told her so bluntly in a strident voice, standing with his back to the fire in the little sitting-room, while Edmund, with the same feeling accentuated, could find no words to express it.

Phosie, who would have met the coolest rebuff with the courage of a high spirit, was deeply touched by his kindness.

"It isn't your money that I wanted," she said—"I have told you my plans—but you don't know how I've longed to make friends."

"Perfectly natural!" exclaimed John Race. "Not another word, my dear girl, not another word. I cannot overlook Walter's injudicious conduct—"

"In marrying me?" interrupted Phosie, smiling.

"Not at all!" said John, laughing as if her question were a capital joke. "I mean his injudicious conduct in allowing this Hatton—Batton—Stratton man to manage his affairs. But Walter was always unbusinesslike and stubborn. I only know one man more unbusinesslike and stubborn than my brother Walter, and that's my brother Leo."

"Leo has written us a very kind letter," said Phosie. "Of course he is angry with Walter too, but he offers to help him all the same."

To her surprise both Mr John Race and the Reverend Edmund took this ill.

"It is rather late in the day for Leo to set us an example of fraternal affection," said the clergyman, drily.

"Confound his impertinence!" exclaimed the J.P. "I am the head of the family and quite capable of taking care of the family's interest and honour without Leo's interference."

"We must look into Walter's affairs," continued Edmund.

"Perhaps it will be possible to save something from the wreck," said John.

"What induced Frank to run off to Canada when his brother was in trouble?" said Edmund.

"I flatter myself we can do very well without Frank," observed the irascible John.

Phosie, glancing from one to the other, here interposed with great earnestness.

"I appreciate your goodness," she said. "But my friend, Mr Boyton, has kindly offered to advise and help us. He is a very clever lawyer, and I trust him implicitly."

"But surely your husband's relatives are the proper people to help and advise?" said the Reverend Edmund.

"Then give me your affection," said Phosie, eagerly.

"Come to see Walter and don't be hard on him. You are really so fond of one another, you brothers! If any trouble comes you are equally loyal and true. I believe you would die for each other. Why can't you live together in peace?"

She stopped abruptly, blushing at her own boldness, but Edmund only smiled indulgently at the little outburst, and John broke into a hearty laugh.

"I like you, Phosie!" he cried. "You've got the courage of your convictions. Of course we're loyal and true to each other, and of course we fight among ourselves. Both qualities make for strength."

"You must see more of Alicia," said Edmund. "She entertains the same views as yourself about family peace. She and her own people have quarrelled over it bitterly many and many a time."

"I should like you to know my wife and the girls," added Mr John Race, graciously, "and I don't think you have seen much of Mrs Leo, have you?"

"I have only met her once," said Phosie.

"Oh, we must put an end to all these little differences," said John, in a tone which implied that Phosie was as much to blame as anybody else. "You are all of you sisters, you know—sisters-in-law—I intend to bring you together. Leave it to me, my dear girl. You can safely leave everything to me."

Mr John Race was as good as his word.

Walter, sitting in his easy chair, was surprised to receive visits, not only from Mrs Edmund, who had always made a point of treating Phosie with patronising kindness, but from Mrs John and Mrs Leo. It was an even greater surprise to observe their treatment of his wife. At first it was merely courteous, then it grew cordial, and then it became affectionate.

In the earlier years of their marriage he would have laughed at Phosie's conquest, but there was a new gravity in Walter Race.

He had suffered, and an undeveloped strength of character was born of his suffering. In the introspection afforded by his long convalescence he could see the growth, the struggling towards acknowledgment, of a new reverence in his life.

He had experienced this feeling before, but only in flashes of passing emotion. It was a reverence of which he never spoke, for the hour had not come, but day by day it shone in his heart with a more steady, unchanging light.

Euphrosyne, at about this time, was frequently absent from his room. He made no complaint—how different from the Walter of other days!—but it greatly troubled him. He missed her in the evenings most of all, but, strange as it may appear, the true reason for her absence never entered his mind. When he asked Gus where she had gone, the ready answer served its turn.

“She’s gone to see Mrs Edmund Race, because she thought the walk would do her good,” said Gus, as if he were repeating a lesson.

Walter was satisfied, and when, night after night, she chose the same hour for the same walk, he grew accustomed to the idea.

“If she only knew how I live for her return,” he thought, but no hint of his loneliness passed his lips.

CHAPTER XXXII

LITTLE GUS ATTAINS HIS MANHOOD

HEWETT ADDISON, in spite of his name and fame, could not open the door twice of golden opportunity.

When Phosie asked him to help her to obtain an engagement, soon after her husband's illness, he was more than willing to use his influence, but the success of her brief career on the music-hall stage was already forgotten.

The Paramount Theatre, where she had appeared as the Lost Fairy, was under new management. Hewett tried in vain to get her a trial turn at one of the smaller West End halls. He applied to his friend Talling, who had composed the music for the "Lost Fairy," for his success as a song-writer was no longer hanging in the balance.

Talling was a man of importance in the peculiar Bohemian world of musical comedy. He had great experience, also, in the halls. Talling remembered Phosie very well. He had been more than half in love with her in the old days—but he did not mention this fact to Addison—and he not only gave her a couple of songs of his own, but taught her how to sing them. Addison arranged a dance, and Miss Sapio insisted on providing a costume.

When this point was reached it was old Quizzical Quilter, the last man in the world whom Talling and Hewett would have invited to their councils, who actually obtained Phosie's engagement.

The manager of the Gem, a small, prosperous music-hall in a busy suburb, happened to be the son of one of Quizzly's oldest friends. Quizzly made it his business to spend an evening at the Gem and raved about little Miss Moore. The manager offered to see her turn, and Mr Quilter returned to the West End delighted with his success.

Addison was inclined to scorn the Gem, but Talling overruled his objections, and Phosie agreed with the composer.

"It would be foolish to refuse an engagement of any kind," she urged.

"Starting at the Gem doesn't mean that one is bound to stop there," said Talling.

"Hear! hear!" cried Miss Sapio.

"Of course I know that the great point is to get an appearance," said Addison.

"There you are!" exclaimed Quizzly; adding, somewhat enigmatically, "We all like a dinner of roast beef and apple dumplings, but there's no harm in a little bit o' fried fish to start."

Phosie's trial turn was a success, not an overwhelming success, but good enough for the manager to give her a month's engagement. He put her on in the early part of the programme, before his patrons were too noisy to listen to her songs.

She was strangely out of place at the Gem. It was positively painful to Addison to see her there, for he did not understand that Phosie created her own atmosphere. Coarse tongues were silent at her approach. She had the knack of making people laugh at trifles, and was able to hold her own, for all her gentleness and gaiety, while her quick, unselfish courtesy made her popular with men and women alike.

Phosie, guarding her secret from her husband, confided everything to Little Gus. It gave him pleasure to be consulted, and being told the amount of her salary,

small as it was, he recovered his usual cheerfulness and left off brooding over possible starvation.

He had implored Phosie, when she returned to Belton Terrace, to accept the whole of his weekly wages, and when she refused he lived in a state of dread, expecting Walter to be arrested for debt and dragged out of his bed by the police at any hour of the day or night.

Gus was not an optimistic companion during the first weeks of trial, and even Jane remonstrated with him on his gloomy outlook.

"Your eyes always look as if you were goin' to cry," she said. "I think you must be nothin' but a grown-up baby."

Remarks such as this depressed Gus, but little Jane, who really loved him, compensated for her severities by impetuous hugging.

Gus often longed in his aimless way for an opportunity to show his devotion to his only friends.

He had always known that Walter Race held him in careless contempt. Even Phosie never suspected how his weak, over-sensitive nature had been wounded by her husband's treatment. He had never meant to be cruel to Gus, any more than he would have been cruel to a harmless animal, but all Gus's poor attempts at an equality of friendship had been simply ignored, for Walter was unconscious of their existence. His very kindness and indifferent hospitality, hardly noticing whether it was accepted, was a vague reproach, a subtle insult, to the manhood of Gus.

He was hurt, humiliated, and the desire to assert himself—to be worthy of the respect of the man whom Phosie had married—had long been the strongest, hidden feeling of his life.

The opportunity came,—the supreme chance,—but not as Little Gus had pictured it in his imagination. In this, as in everything else, he was unfortunate.

The bright hour which proves its greatness is often the darkest hour for the heroic soul.

The Gem music-hall was an old, badly-constructed, inconvenient building. The front of the house, the stage and principal dressing-rooms were arranged, according to modern regulations, in as safe and comfortable a manner as possible. There were plenty of exits, and the staircase was of stone. At the back of the stage was a swing-door leading to a narrow flight of stairs which communicated with two small rooms, all that remained of an old house formerly occupying the site of the modern music-hall.

Phosie had been given one of these little rooms, mere cupboards in size, the other being used by three sisters, trapeze artistes.

She was very glad to be alone, and until the night of Gus's adventure had had no objection to her comparative isolation, for the girls in the room below did not arrive till late, being engaged at another hall in the early part of the evening. Phosie could hear, when she opened her door, the orchestra and audience in the distance.

Little Gus, who had haunted the gallery of the Paramount during the career of the "Lost Fairy," as persistently haunted the Gem, except on the days when he stopped at home to keep Walter company, but that was not often, for Walter really preferred to be alone.

Gus was admitted behind the scenes, for there were no strict rules at the Gem. The place seemed to possess a peculiar fascination for him. Sometimes he stood in the wings staring at the performers, but more often he wandered aimlessly about the back of the stage, or sat on a roll of carpet, occasionally chatting with the stage hands or listening to the conversation of the artistes.

He was interested in everything to do with a theatre, and even a commonplace hall like the Gem possessed

a glamour for his inexperience. The work of the electrician filled him with admiration; he was always excited at a change of scenery, and he would stand in the most uncomfortable position, till his back ached, for the pleasure of getting a glimpse of the audience through holes in the canvas.

One night, in the confusion of setting the stage more elaborately than usual for the benefit of a new turn, Gus found himself hemmed into a corner at the back, close to the swing-door leading to the extra dressing-rooms, where it was so dark that the carpenters had not seen him sitting on his usual roll of carpet.

Gus smiled at the situation. He was apparently imprisoned, and, without attempting to slip through the pieces of scenery, he resigned himself to his fate, looking forward to the surprise of the men when he should be discovered.

It was a gloomy seat and there was nothing to amuse him. He soon began to yawn. After a little while his head bobbed forward, jerked back, then gradually sank down on his chest, and he was fast asleep.

Gus always slept heavily, and as it happened that the pieces of scenery surrounding him were not required, he was undisturbed for over an hour. Phosie's turn was over. She thought he had gone home. No one had any idea of his hiding-place.

Suddenly, into the depths of his dreamless sleep, a strange noise drummed into his ears, and at the same time he became dimly conscious of a tickling, unpleasant sensation in his throat.

He stirred, coughed, and shook himself back to reason. His eyelids seemed, for the minute, to cling together. He coughed again. There was the sound of hurrying feet, a sharp voice raised above the din, and the distant rattle of a march from the orchestra.

For a second Little Gus stared into strange, smoky mist—puzzled, troubled, only half awake. Then the

truth crept into his slow brain, but he could not realise what it meant.

The back of the stage was on fire—that was it—he said the words to himself, listening to the hurrying feet and the sharp voice of command.

The back of the stage was on fire! He thought he had only been asleep for a few minutes. Phosie was still in her room—and the back of the stage was on fire. He said it to himself over and over again.

What could he do? Why had they not warned him? Did they know he was there? He must rush out and tell them.

Fire! Phosie was still in her room. He must save her.

This was a new thought. It drove all others out of his brain.

He must save Phosie.

It was an easy matter to slip between the wings of scenery to the swing-door.

The curling grey mist of smoke made his throat and eyes smart, but the possibility of actual danger did not occur to him. It was unpleasant, even painful, but nothing more. In a second he hoped to reach Phosie's room and they could run downstairs together.

The men who were fighting the fire towards the front of the stage had not seen or heard him. Starting in the flies, smoke and flames were swiftly spreading over the upper part of the building. The audience was safe. The performers were crowded round the stage door. The street was thronged with people. The Gem was turned to a ruby, glowing in the night.

Little Gus staggered up the wooden stairs to Phosie's room. He shouted her name. His throat, his eyes, his nose were tingling and sore. He was dazed, bewildered, and slipped on the top step, striking his head against the closed door.

"Phosie!" he gasped again, pulling himself up.

He groped for the handle and threw open the door. It shut behind him. The room was empty.

The electric light was hanging over the dressing-table. The smoke which twined its way through the frame of the door had not yet obscured its brilliance. Phosie's dancing dress hung against the wall, wrapped in a white cloth; several pairs of little satin shoes stood in a line on the floor.

All the trifles on the dressing-table were neatly arranged—the hare's foot, the big box of powder, the sticks of grease paint, the eau-de-Cologne, the hair brushes—and several snapshots of Jane were stuck in the side of the looking-glass.

Little Gus, staring and coughing, saw only one object of interest in the room, and that was a glass of water containing a bunch of violets.

Water! He sprang forward, threw out the flowers, and poured it down his throat.

Then he turned to make his escape. It was too late. He opened the door on blinding smoke. The hot air rushed into his face. The wooden staircase was crackling and spluttering like a handful of dry twigs tossed on a smouldering fire.

A shriek of terror broke from his lips. For a few seconds he was like a madman. He tore his hair and waved his arms over his head, his face convulsed with horrible grimaces.

But this passed. The love of his life—the daily habit of his thoughts—did not fail him in the moment of his great need.

He remembered Phosie. She was safe.

With this knowledge the futility of what he had done rushed over his struggling soul.

His whole life was futile. The years passed before him in a second of time.

He was to die—alone! She would never know, her husband would never know, what he had tried to do. They would forget him.

"God help me!" groaned Little Gus.

In the prayer was the answer.

A sense of triumph swept over him. What were success or failure in the light of his heroic deed? It is not the accomplishment, but the effort which counts. The ordeal passed is the test of character. He had never thought of this before, but he felt that it was true.

So, in that vital minute which passed between his madness of fear and his leap for life, Little Gus attained his manhood and conquered despair.

The table stood in front of the window. He dragged its heavy weight aside as easily as if it had been a toy, threw up the sash and leaned out, shouting for help.

There was no answer. He heard a confused noise in the distance, but the back of the music-hall, where he stood, was shut in by high, windowless walls.

Below him was the dark outline of a flat roof. It was impossible to measure the distance. He climbed on to the sill, for the heat and smoke of the room were blinding, looked over his shoulder for one shuddering breath, gathered himself together, shut his eyes, and jumped down.

It was over. He felt a shock of pain, writhed for a second, throwing out one arm, and lost consciousness.

At the same time Phosie, pacing up and down her room, waited anxiously for his return. Walter was asleep and knew nothing of Little Gus's absence.

The hours dragged heavily past, and she saw the dawn break.

The manager of the music-hall sent her news in the early morning. They had found her old friend lying on the roof—bruised, shattered, with broken limbs, the wreck of a man—but still alive.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AFTER MANY MONTHS

EUPHROSYNE turned the bulbs to the sun. Jane, standing on tiptoe on the seat of a chair beside her, looked at the little green shoots with absorbing interest.

It was a morning in spring, when the fresh breezes of a promising year find their way into city streets, straight from the awakening woods and open meadows.

There were spring flowers in the room, the first of the flaring daffodils, faint violets, and the last of the delicate snowdrops.

Belton Terrace, one of the most depressed of streets during the winter, made an annual effort to recover its good appearance in the spring. Many of the houses were painted, and it was a general custom to hang new curtains at clean windows.

Phosie had done more. Her winter's work was seen in the bright chintz covers on the chairs, the pretty lamp-shades, and the freshly-papered walls. All her four rooms were characteristic: simple, spotless, gay in colour.

Everything was changed from the day when Mr and Mrs Race returned to the Terrace from Temple Street. The landlady's furniture had gradually given place to furniture of their own, piece by piece as they could afford it, only the piano and an old-fashioned bookcase, with glass doors, being gifts.

The piano was a belated wedding present from her

uncle, Joseph Ridgeway, and the bookcase had been given to Phosie by Hewett Addison.

Phosie had first met her uncle, by accident, at the office of Messrs Faraday & Boyton. Mr Faraday said it was providential. Mr Boyton said it was jolly good luck.

Joseph Ridgeway, who had loved his sister, looked at her daughter with curious, critical eyes, and his recognition of the relationship took the peculiar form of a remark on her hands, for having devoted twenty-five years of his life to the business it might be said that Mr Ridgeway judged all things in the world by the glove calibre.

"So this is Euphrosyne?" he said, lifted her hand, looked at it, palm and back, and released her with a little smile.

"Yes, I'll have you for my niece," he continued. "You've got a hand worthy of the best Grenoble glove, size five - and - three - quarters, real Dauphiné kid."

This was a great compliment, for he was naturally a silent, reserved man, and he seemed to be more interested in Phosie's recollections of his old friend, Henry Revell, than in anything she had to tell him about herself.

Phosie was bitterly disappointed. Mr Boyton told her she simply did not understand Joe Ridgeway. She was inclined to reject this consolation, but when her uncle unexpectedly appeared at Belton Terrace the day after their meeting and stopped to three meals, she began to think Mr Boyton was right.

Her uncle had never married, and he reminded her in many ways of Mr Revell. She found herself taking care of him, studying his little eccentricities, treating him in exactly the manner she had treated her dear guardian. He was almost as unresponsive, but he continued to visit Belton Terrace, first making her a present

of his latest novelty—seamless gloves in suède leather—and afterwards giving her a piano.

Walter's recovery was very gradual, but long before he was able to work he had made up his mind to "do something." It was very vague and unsatisfactory. He had had no training for any of the lucrative professions. "Walter must enter a lucrative profession," was his brother John's favourite phrase, and something like despair seized upon him during the wearisome days of his slow recovery.

For a long time he had believed himself dependent on his brothers' generosity, and when he discovered Phosie had returned to the stage and he was living on her little salary, Walter Race passed through the most bitter-sweet hour of his life.

His desire to work, from that day, grew into a passion. It haunted him. The wildest schemes, the most ambitious projects, passed through his mind.

John Race's words, "lucrative profession," buzzed in his ears. He repeated them to his wife, to Gus, even to Joseph Ridgeway. Phosie only smiled, Gus promptly adopted them as his own, but Mr Ridgeway grew thoughtful.

"Drop the word profession," he said. "Why don't you say business?"

"That doesn't solve the problem," said Walter. "What business in the world can I go in for?"

"Mine!" said Joseph Ridgeway. "Gloves."

"Yours?" exclaimed Walter, with sudden hope and excitement in his voice.

"Why not?" asked Mr Ridgeway. "If you care to start at the bottom of the ladder you can. I'm willing to give you a chance. I want a secretary and useful man about me, and later on, if you like it, you can study the business properly in France. If you once begin you must learn it all, from the start to the finish, from 'the skin in the white,' as we say, to 'the banding and

boxing.' What do you think, Walter? Are you willing to work—work hard for your bread—like any other honest man who has run through his wife's money as well as his own? "

Phosie put out a hand to stop him. The words were cruel and made her wince, but her husband returned Mr Ridgeway's searching glance with much of his old pride.

"You shall see," was all he answered.

Phosie was thinking of that talk as she put up her spring curtains and turned the bulbs to the sun, for her uncle was invited to dinner—late dinner, accompanying her husband back from the office—it being the end of the second month of Walter's engagement.

Mr and Mrs Hewett Addison were also invited. Phosie had wondered what effect their marriage would have upon Miss Sapio and the popular playwright.

They were utterly unchanged. Flo was still exuberant, and her husband was more inscrutable than ever. They lived in her small house in Regent's Park, but Hewett still retained one of his old rooms in Plantagenet Court. The tenant who succeeded him happening to be a friend, it was easily managed. He had done some of his best work in that room, and the view it afforded over river and roofs had always inspired him.

There were only three things in the world which, the more he knew them the more he was captivated—London, his work, his wife.

The hackneyed saying, there is no accounting for tastes, explained to his friends Hewett Addison's choice of Miss Sapio, a woman who was older than he was, talkative, effusive, no longer in the heyday of her beauty, the very antithesis from himself. Few people understood that she added colour to his life, refreshed him with her vitality, and inspired his best work; her warm, impulsive nature continually counteracting the innate melancholy of his.

Phosie's little dinner-party was a great success. Jane, awakened by the sound of voices and laughter, sat up in her bed to join in the unusual festivities, and called aloud for jelly and fruit.

Gus, always her willing slave, instantly carried his own plate into her room and shared his dessert.

Gus was still on crutches, but his face, terribly injured in the fall on the roof, was slowly recovering line and colour.

Few people credited the weak-eyed cripple with the record of even a minute's heroism, for he would be insignificant and feeble-spirited to the end of the chapter, but the three whom he loved best in the world, his only friends, were proud of Little Gus. In their eyes he was the most loyal of friends, the most dear of brothers.

He lived alone, held his old place in Mr Faraday's office, and found a great solace for lonely hours in practising the concertina. He was not very musical, but there was satisfaction in struggling with his instrument, admired and encouraged by Jane.

The hour was late when the guests departed.

Phosie and her husband, left alone, drew their chairs up to the hearth and sat down to talk for a few minutes by the light of the fire.

"So ends my second month," said Walter Race, lounging in his favourite attitude, hands clasped behind his head, long legs outstretched.

"Do you still like it, dear?" asked Phosie.

He laughed, and did not answer for a second.

"Yes, I like it;" then he said slowly, "I am beginning to understand and appreciate the good qualities of my colleagues. I haven't learned much, but I see that no work is mean or despicable that one does well, even if it's only sitting on a wooden stool answering letters from wooden-headed correspondents. I'm beginning to take an interest in the art of glove-making—'doling,'

cutting, webbing, and all the rest of it. Aren't you looking forward to our little French trip, Phosie, when I mean to train myself thoroughly in gloves, so that I shall be able to distinguish the various qualities and values of the articles we handle. I'm getting on! You'll be proud of me yet."

He laughed again, with his eyes, which had grown so strangely kind and gentle, fixed on her face.

"I have always been proud of you," she said.

"You were always a little flatterer!"

He lighted a cigarette and smoked a while in silence, still looking at his wife.

"How do you manage it, Phosie?" he asked, suddenly.

"How do I manage it?" she repeated, in a puzzled voice.

"Yes, the elegance—the charm—dinner-parties—the gorgeous style of our establishment in general," he replied, smiling.

Phosie laughed.

"How absurd you are! Can anybody be gorgeous in Belton Terrace? I suppose I'm a born home-maker," she added thoughtfully, "I like it. I am glad to leave the stage, although people were so kind to me, and Flo Addison says I have lost a career."

She stirred the fire into a blaze. Shadows danced on the walls, and the fitful red glow shone over her face and figure as she stooped forward, shading her eyes with one hand.

"Do you remember the night when you made a fire in our room, after I had told you about the smash?" asked Walter, suddenly.

"Oh, yes. Why do you ask me?" she said.

He did not answer directly, but leaning forward, his hands clasped between his knees, he, too, looked into the fire.

The handsome severity of his face had changed since his illness. The features themselves were more clearly

cut than ever; the dark hair was still untouched with grey, but he looked much older. His expression was more changeable—quicker, but calmer at the same time—and even his voice vibrated with a new tone.

"Do you realise what you have done, Phosie?" he said at last, not answering her question but asking another.

"No. What have I done?" said Phosie, lightly.

"Everything in the world!" he answered. "It was your old friend, Mr Boyton, whose advice and help saved me from utter ruin. It was your uncle who gave me work. It was you who kept a roof over our heads by your dancing. You have never reproached me by a word or look. Think of my people! They love and admire you. You have won them by your sweet simplicity. Think of Little Gus! You have saved his soul. What would he have been without you? A mere drudge—an outcast. Think of your husband! What have you done for your husband—"

"Walter! Stop! I can't bear your praise. You mustn't speak to me like this—" she interrupted, for his voice was shaking and his eyes shone.

"I must!" he went on quickly. "I have wanted to tell you, for a long time, what is in my heart."

"Love, there is no need," she murmured.

"Think of our marriage, Phosie," he said, slowly now, choosing his words. "I only thought of myself—all myself! You amused me. You captivated me. I thought I was doing you a great honour. I was half ashamed to tell my people."

She tried to interrupt again, and he answered what she meant to say.

"I know I never put it into words, but it was the truth all the same. That was why I never took you to see John or Leo. I was actually grateful to Edmund and his wife for treating you with civility. I saw how everybody admired you—other women, Wainwright, a genius

like Hewett Addison—and I told myself it was all your pretty tricks, it was only your pretty face. I had been caught myself—lost my head over you—and I was amused to see other victims.”

“Don’t speak so bitterly,” she said.

“I want you to see me, Phosie, as I see myself,” continued her husband. “You know how we lived in Plantagenet Court? Idle, wasted days! It was never your fault. You tried to awaken some manhood in me. I think I began to understand you when we went to Sterry, but only a little. I was wilfully blind. I thought of you lightly—the old nicknames expressed it—sprite, fairy, elf, little creature who had danced into my life. Even the child made no difference.”

“Ah, Walter!” she sighed, understanding, as he went on, the meaning of a strange sense of unreality which had clouded the first years of her marriage.

“I made up my mind the child would be like you. Another pretty toy to take care of,” said Walter. “But you know I was wrong. I saw myself in her eyes. She seemed to be all mine. I was stirred with the mystery of Love and Life. Oh, Euphrosyne! Strange, strange how the tie of marriage, the birth of my child, and the discipline of my secret heart should all have sprung from half a dozen notes of music.”

“I don’t understand you, Walter.”

“All from a girl’s laugh—yours!”

She knelt down upon the floor and put her arms round his neck, pressing her cheek to his with the old fond caress.

“My heart!” he whispered. “On that starry night when we walked through the quiet streets together—you remember, my Phosie?—I felt as I do now, enraptured by your goodness, exalted by your love. It was a leaping flame, but I crushed it down. I darkened its pure light with passion—indifference—pride—self! self!

self! It burns again clearly in my soul, and I see you as you are."

Her only answer was to murmur his name, but he felt her happy tears on his face.

"I know myself at last," he said, and then he repeated; "I see you as you are—spirit of joy, spirit of love, spirit of light—not too late, Phosie, not too late—"



